

**“Black Power Does Not Come Out of the Sky”:
The Emergence of Black Power Politics in the Northern Student Movement,
1961-1968**

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In my home, St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands, a historian and community activist, opens his daily radio talk show by saying, “Beloved, it don't matta how big a basket dey give you, always remember 1 and 1 we could fill up de basket, just as long as we do it tooogetha!” This thesis is a basket that has been filled by the contributions of a beloved community of scholars, freedom fighters, family members, and friends. I am honored to have my scholarship join the historical literature especially that on the transatlantic black freedom struggle. I cannot convey in words how much I have grown over this journey and the wealth of wisdom I have received along the way. I cannot thank each and every person whose guidance and support carried me across the finish line. If I fail to mention you, know that you are appreciated.

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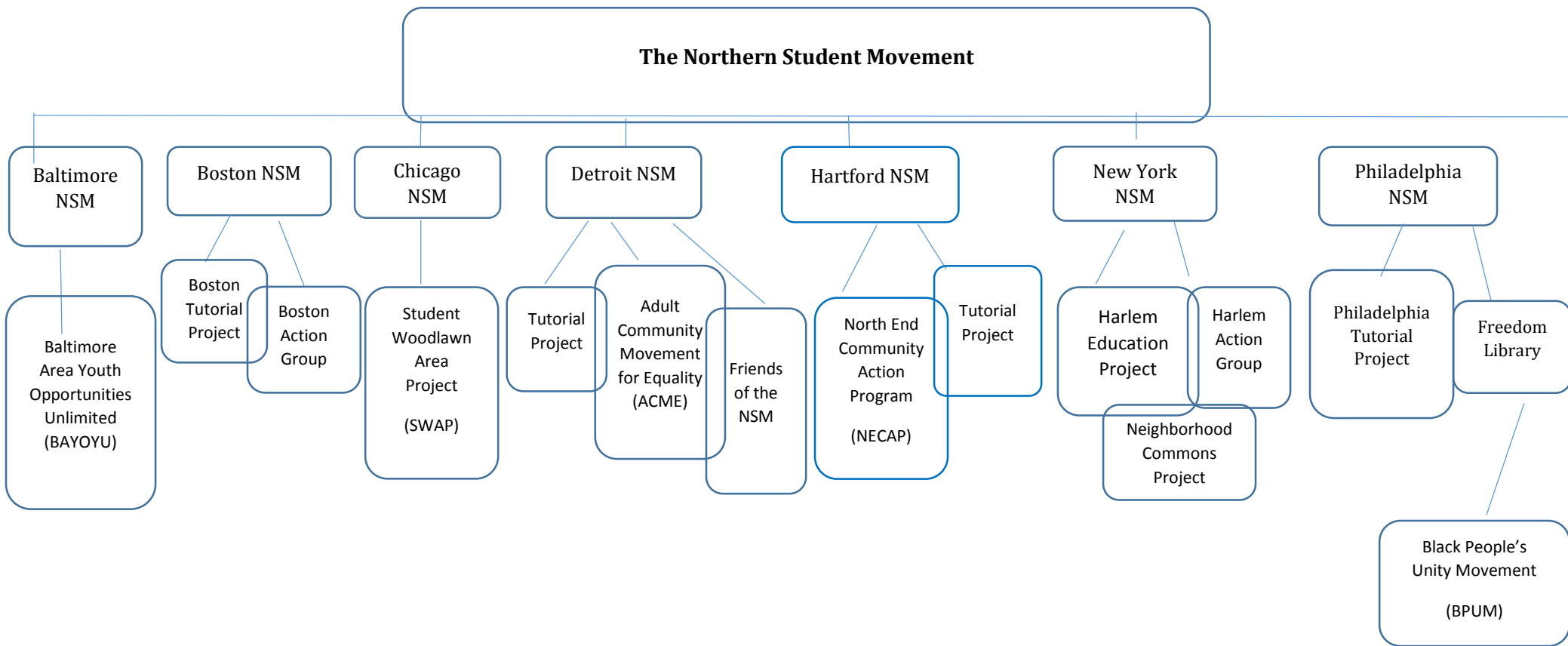
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The Northern Student Movement's City Projects and Activities, 1961-1968



This graph represents the major local city projects. Other initiatives existed under each city's purview. There were overlaps between projects, as noted by the overlap between shapes.

The NSM's Washington D.C. District Action Project lasted until late 1963 while the *Newark Summer Project*, the *Morris County Citizenship Project* ran for one summer.

The Freedom Library left the Northern Student Movement after 1966.

Introduction

“[T]he more I have thought about our past, the more excited I have become over its significance because... Before the Panthers, there was NSM. Before SNCC’s Atlanta project and before media-generated hysteria over "Black Power," there was NSM. Before all of these more recognized historical events, NSM had already initiated a race-conscious strategy to confront American racism. In fact Detroit NSM had formed probably the first really constructive white organization to combat the monster: PAR, People Against Racism. What I’ve come to realize is that the NSM story is not just our story.”

-William “Bill” Strickland

Shortly after the New Year in 1965, Mr. Granville Cherry sat in his apartment on 2560 Eight Avenue, Harlem, wondering why the problems of the old year had returned. For four days, Mr. Cherry and his family of seven did not have water, electricity, and heat. It was a cold winter day. Mr. Cherry knocked on the doors of his tenants and together they proceeded to picket in front of City Hall. The cold weather was no match for the determination of Mr. Cherry’s search for an answer. The sit-in group waited hours for “His Honor”, or the Mayor, in hopes of expressing their frustrations and demands. The Mayor, however, had other plans. He walked straight past them and closed his door. Finally, a city representative met with the group and they agreed to wait for improved services. Sensing it was the usual run around, however, the group decided to take further action. They hosted a city-wide meeting, bringing local housing organizations together. At the meeting, they decided to hold a demonstration at City Hall on Monday morning and fifteen representatives would meet the Mayor. On Monday afternoon, Mr. Cherry and his fellow tenants received heat and hot water along with every other building in East Harlem among a host of other new initiatives. Mr. Cherry was not an established civil rights leader. Rather, Mr. Cherry was an average citizen who saw a problem and decided to do

something about it. In the shadows stood the young organizers he met almost a year and a half earlier. Those organizers operated under the name of the Northern Student Movement.¹

Black Power Does Not Come Out of the Sky tells the story of the interracial community organizing tradition and its evolution during the 1960s through the lens of the Northern Student Movement. It tells the story of how young college students across northern cities worked with local community people, like Mr. Granville Cherry, to deal with unresponsive institutional structures. At the same time, *Black Power Does Not Come Out of the Sky* narrates the progression of young, ideological activists as they moved to the more “radical mystique” that evolved by 1964 to confront the frustrations of white liberalism and American democracy. The center of the story reveals how black and white organizers faced internal conflict and tensions over organizing strategy. Most importantly, this thesis establishes that the Northern Student Movement, a forgotten voice of the northern black freedom struggle, significantly influenced the emergence of black power politics in the North.

Young, idealistic, and ready to test the waters of American democracy, the Northern Student Movement represented a segment of the New Left that sought a more active involvement in the nation’s affairs while attempting to reform the Old Left, or the old “liberal tradition” that focused on ideology. Inspired by the anti-war movement and the black freedom struggle, northern college students found ways to get involved in the movement. During the 1960s sit-ins, many found their way “down South.” Peter Countryman, a Yale student, was one of those profoundly impacted by black leaders in the South. Deciding to become active, Countryman and a group of students spearheaded the Northern Student Movement. From their founding

¹ *The Organizer*, January 28, 1965, NSM Papers, Box 1, Folder 2.

conference in 1962, the NSM would lead a remarkable effort in the North to remedy deeply rooted racial injustices, while reforming their approach to local political struggle in hopes of building an independent black North that was free.

This thesis deconstructs the master narrative of the civil rights movement and instead contributes to a field of growing literature on the organic local organizing tradition. At the center of the master narrative is Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the mass mobilization campaigns of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" speech and the 1964 Civil Rights Act and 1965 Voting Rights Act were declared victories as a result of the non-violent, direct action, integrationist platform of the movement. Bayard Rustin, the great organizer, later described it as the "classical phase" of the movement. Historian Peniel Joseph has referred to it as the *heroic period* of the civil rights era. The "bad/unheroic" period is placed in a dichotomy with this "good era", where civil rights leaders advocated for the American creed of democracy rather than challenge the ineffective civil rights agenda of the white establishment.² In historical and public memory, we continue to have a misguided, oversimplified understanding of the black freedom struggle and its dynamic triumph and challenges.

As a consequence of the master narrative, the "southernization" of American racism and the movement has occupied the front pages of our history books. There, the images of black men and black women being attacked by fire hoses, dogs, and police men are in the front pages. By concentrating on the southern contexts, we fail to gain a complete understanding of race and racism in the post-war black freedom struggle. Additionally, we place a dividing geographical

² Peniel Joseph, ed. *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era*. (New York: Routledge, 2006), 3.

border---splitting the movement into the North and the South regions, a movement one reactionary and the other real. Jeanne Theoharris warns of the danger of these misguided and unnecessary dichotomies. She writes, “Foregrounding the South...makes it seem as if the South was the only part of the country that needed a movement, as if blacks in the rest of the country only became energized to fight after their Southern brothers and sisters did.”³

Black Power Does Not Come out of the Sky furthers the paradigm of the long civil rights movement. The meta-narrative of the civil rights movement establishes that the civil rights movement began in 1954 with the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision and ended in 1965 at the turn of black power. The story of the NSM negates such a narrative by showing that its interracial tradition stretched back to a Left coalition beginning in the 1940s. Historian Jacquelyn Dowd Hall has argued that “many years of astute and aggressive” organizing began in the 1940s to dismantle the racial social order. Robert Korstad has written about the “alchemy of laborites, civil rights activists, New Dealers, and black and white radicals, some of whom were associated with the Communist Party.”⁴ In *Civil Rights Unionism*, his study of exploited black factory workers in Winston-Salem, North Carolina at the height of the Great Depression, he documents how black factory workers teamed up with left and liberal organizations to demand better working conditions.⁵ In the pages that follow, I show that NSM organizers, both black and white, were continuing the “coalition tradition” of building democracy by working collectively on a host of civil rights issues. Critical here is the recognition

³ Jeanne Theoharris and Komozi Woodard, eds. *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South, 1940-1980*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 2-3.

⁴ Jacquelyn Dowd Hall. “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past,” *Organization of American Historians* 91, no.4: (March 2005), 1233-1263.

⁵ Korstad, Robert. *Civil Rights Unionism: Tobacco Workers and the Struggle for Democracy in the Mid-Twentieth Century South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

that black veterans of these movements began to break their alliance with New Left coalitions as factions developed over who should make the agenda and who should control it. The seeds of interracial tension were already there. Yet, the NSM, in mission and practice, sought to address those tensions, bring unity to coalition work while solidifying a movement on black communal strength and organization.

Shifting away from the master-narrative the movement, this thesis questions the assumptions of when the northern freedom struggle began. In his book *Better Day Coming: Blacks and Equality*, Adam Fairclough incorrectly suggests, that “[Martin Luther King Jr., and SCLC’s campaign in] Chicago was the first and only real attempt by the Civil Rights Movement to mount a major campaign of nonviolent direct action in the North.”⁶ Unfortunately, Fairclough misses not only the NSM, but generations of civil rights activity in the North. He also places the movement within the master narrative by framing the movement as “moving up” North from the South.

World War II and its aftermath, as historian Martha Biondi has written, was a “watershed for the northern civil rights movement.”⁷ The activism of the NSM thus grew out of the social and economic circumstances in the post war period. Between 1940 and 1950, the wartime capitalist expansion gave rise to an “affluent society” enamored with the prospect of abundance and promise of new consumer goods.⁸ The mid-century affluence drew millions of African-Americans from the rural, agricultural South to the urban, industrial North. By migrating North,

⁶ Adam Fairclough, *Better Day Coming, Blacks and Equality, 1890-2000* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), 303.

⁷ Martha Biondi. *The Black Revolution on Campus* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 7.

⁸ Galbraith, John., ed. *The Affluent Society and Other Writings, 1952-1967*: New York, The Library of America, 2010.

black and white Southerners pursued better economic conditions. Black southerners also fled Jim Crow. Northern affluence was deceptive, however, and postwar urban capitalist growth was unevenly distributed, especially in black working class communities. Furthermore, rapid economic growth masked structural decline as millions of low level manufacturing jobs were lost at the end of the war. Migration coincided with deindustrialization and deurbanization and as African-Americans moved up North, job competition between blacks and whites became fierce. The poor labor and housing markets led to the expansion of urban ghettos thereby expanding residential segregation and racial inequality.⁹

In the postwar era, civil rights activists sought to link Hitler's racial ideologies with domestic racism.¹⁰ Civil rights organizations, trade unions, and a host of biracial coalitions worked together to build an anti-racist agenda. However, by the 1960s those gains did not bring sufficient change, despite legal challenges and triumphs in housing advocacy, segregation, and racial discrimination. As historian Thomas Sugrue notes, "Increasing joblessness and the decaying infrastructure of inner-city neighborhoods, reinforced white stereotypes of black people, families, and communities."¹¹ Black veterans of coalition work would break away from such civil rights liberalism to challenge such stereotypes of black pathology and the inability of blacks to change their situation. The black freedom struggle became supported by black communal organization and strength. The NSM predicated their work on this communal tradition. Peter Countryman believed they could prosper based on the support and participation

⁹ Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006) and Kenneth Kusmer and Joe Trotter, eds., *African-American History Since World War II* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009).

¹⁰ Matthew Countryman, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 2-47.

¹¹ Sugrue, 6.

of black communities. “Without this total community involvement,” he wrote, “all success will be piecemeal and of little consequence to the disillusioned masses.”¹²

The research presented here complicates the current narrative of the origins of the black power movement by exploring the politics of black nationalism and racial separatism before 1966 as an organizing instrument to achieve independent political organization. On June 16, 1966, Stokely Carmichael, SNCC organizer and leader, spoke before a crowd at the Meredith March, in reaction after James Meredith was shot during his “March Against Fear”. Protesting against police brutality, Carmichael said, “This is the twenty-seventh time that I’ve been arrested. I ain’t going to jail no more. The only way we gonna stop them white men from whuppin’ us is to take over. What we gonna start saying now is Black Power!” Carmichael and the slogan would ring in the hearts and turn the heads of others. Black power became identified with a militant, spontaneous and unorganized form of struggle. Yet, the story of the NSM shows how the turn to black power was rooted in grassroots activism and conflict wrought over ideological debates on movement autonomy and white liberals role in the movement well before 1966.

The first chapter examines the blueprint of the Northern Student Movement and its early relation to the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). The young activists were inspired by the sit-in movement. Upon reflection, the group’s leaders reflected on the possibilities of a northern movement. This thesis shows the transition of the NSM from a fundraising organization to a student activist organization. The Port Huron Statement of 1962 which called for participatory democracy becomes a game changer for what the NSM seeks to

¹² Peter Countryman, “Students and Race in the North,” NSM Papers, Box 1, Folder 17.

accomplish in its activities. I introduce the NSM as pioneers in New Left activism and locate their origins in the northern freedom struggle.

Chapter 2 narrates the NSM's approach to the community organizing tradition against the backdrop of burgeoning local movements in Philadelphia and Harlem. I show how the NSM's first project, the Philadelphia Tutorial Project, was the first step towards the negotiation of racial liberalism and black political activism in Philadelphia. The tensions over the structure of the Philadelphia Tutorial Project, in which white college students tutored black students, provided an impetus for black leadership in the organization. As the leadership changes from white to black, the nationalist agenda takes precedent and so too does a focus on community action programs. I explore the rent strike movement in New York City as a larger framework for understanding the local protest activity in other NSM projects and the larger freedom struggle. The story of Mr. Granville Cherry, a local community leader, for the first time, is written in these pages. Black leaders' growing resentment towards white liberals and white-liberal led institutions is demonstrated with the failure of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party and William Strickland's experiences as executive director in the New York headquarters.

The final chapter studies the emergence of black power politics in the NSM and the decline of the interracial tradition. I dispute the dichotomy of the civil rights movement and the black power movement by showing that black power stemmed from local frustrations over the direction and applicability of the movement to a northern context. I explore the perspectives of different white and black project leaders over the question of black power and the need for black autonomy and what it meant for grassroots democracy. While I suggest that the NSM's turn to an all-black organization was strategic, I also show how the departure of white NSM volunteers and staff confirmed the belief of black leaders that they were engaged in a more radical struggle.

Beginning with John Churchville's Freedom Library Project and ending with the Black People's Unity Movement, I establish that black power was not only an ideology or sloganry for the NSM. Rather, the NSM sought to build a racially conscious movement across ideological and class lines with black political organization and empowerment at its base.

Black Power Does Not Come Out of the Sky joins a growing literature on the black freedom struggle in its evolution and complexity. Charles Payne's *I've Got the Light of Freedom* and John Dittmer's *Local People* document the Mississippi Movement and the community organizing tradition. These histories have pioneered the re-imagination of the 1960s freedom struggle and the activism of local black activists. The thesis is also in conversation with local activism in the North and how the NSM never quite looked to the mainstream, local agenda to address racial inequity and discrimination in the North but rather the involvement of the poor and oppressed. William Chafe's *Civilities and Civil Rights*, published in 1981, has made a significant impact on the study of grassroots activism, the negotiation of black and white leaders and the resulting "progressive mystique." The prior literature focuses on southern movements but by utilizing the framework to discuss NSM activity, I show that this was hardly a dichotomous struggle and that American racism was not a dichotomous entity.

Matthew Countryman, the son of Peter Countryman, has written an excellent study of black activism in Philadelphia and interrelates northern civil rights and black power against the backdrop of civil rights liberalism. *Up South* documents the failure of post war civil rights liberalism and interracial coalition building in the city. Countryman cleverly shows the expansion of the southern movement into the northern movement. The story of Philadelphia is integral to my story of the NSM. Here, I show how black Philadelphians, particularly John Churchville, helped construct a local black nationalist movement to reshape identity, and

generate political empowerment among the black working and middle classes. *Up South* complements *Black Power Does Not Come Out of the Sky* because they both establish a historical conversation on the decline of the liberal civil rights alliance and the emergence of the black power movement in local communities.

Jeanne Theoharris and Komozi Woodard's *Freedom North* and *Groundwork* have helped me tremendously in understanding the postwar black freedom struggle outside of the South to write part of the NSM's history. These anthologies contain a collection of essays that also concentrates on grassroots activism and campaigns, such as school desegregation and welfare rights. *Black Power Does Not Come Out of the Sky* is a continuation of these historians' efforts to uncover the long forgotten northern black freedom movement while placing it as a chapter of the black freedom struggle over generations.

I use three terms extensively that I hope to make clear. These are "North", "community organizing, and "black nationalism." I use North to refer to the northeast of the United States. Other scholars have used this term to refer to the West and Midwest. When I do refer to Chicago, for example, I will use the city's name. I have developed a strong connection to Charles Payne's definition of the community organizing tradition. He defines it as "a tradition with a different sense of what freedom means and therefore a greater emphasis on the long term development of leadership in ordinary men and women, a tradition best epitomized by [SNCC] leaders. This tradition, although not in stark contrast, is distinguishable from the "community-mobilizing" tradition that centered on "large-scale, relatively short-term public events" such as the March on Washington and the work of Dr. Martin Luther King.¹³ Finally, Michael C. Dawson has provided

¹³ Charles Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 3.

an intellectual synthesis of African-American political ideologies in his work *Black Visions*. My conceptualization of black nationalism derives directly from his definition: “Black nationalism is support for African-American autonomy and self-determination, but various degrees of cultural, social, economic, and political separation from white America.”¹⁴ I strongly believe his definition encapsulates the NSM organizers definition of nation, identity and political organization. Particularly, in Chapter 3, Churchville’s experiences demonstrate those core concepts of black autonomy and the failures of black liberalism.

My work brings together numerous sources that speak with each other to answer the research question. Through oral history interviews with former NSM leaders, project directors, and volunteers, I gained a firsthand look into the remarkable journey of the NSM. These leaders have made my research more authentic and meaningful as they have recounted events honestly and to the best of their ability. Many of my primary sources come from the Northern Student Movement’s Records at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. This collection is expansive and hosts a range of correspondence, journals, and movement documents from different sectors of the organization. Of course, every document is not featured here, but as a researcher I have worked diligently to use those that capture the evolution of the NSM over time.

It is unimaginable, and in many ways ironic, that the NSM has not received its proper place in history. My thesis will be the first comprehensive work on one aspect of the organization’s role in the black freedom struggle. Recently published, *Down to the Crossroads* by Aram Goudsouzian, gives a brief summary of William Strickland and the NSM’s influence and use of black power as language and strategy before the Carmichael era. Dittmer’s *Local*

¹⁴ Michael Dawson, *Black Visions: The Roots of Contemporary African-American Political Ideologies* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 87.

People briefly mentions Strickland as a “black activist...of major assistance” to the recruitment of Freedom Summer volunteers. In essence, my thesis expands on limited research on the NSM and I hope it will be used as groundwork to celebrate NSM’s history and legacy.

Finally, *Black Power Does Not Come Out of the Sky* is one story out of many. Every NSM project leader or volunteer is not mentioned here. This is my story but it is my hope that others will follow and explore the myriad of narratives that the NSM provides to us, whether gender and race dynamics or the reconceptualization of the New Left as one founded on black activism. The story ahead reminds us all that participatory democracy and freedom, past and present, go hand in hand.

Chapter 1: “A Blueprint for the Actualization of Democracy”: The Making of the Northern Student Movement, 1961-1962

“It is up to us in the north to provide aid and support to those who are actually bearing the brunt of the fight for equality down south. America has its iron curtain too.”

Jackie Robinson

“Another group with a vital role to play in the struggle for racial justice and equality is the white northern liberals. The racial issue that we confront in America is not a sectional problem but a national problem...There is pressing need for a liberalism in the North that is truly liberal, that firmly believes in integration in its own community as well as in the deep South. There is need for the type of liberal who not only rises up with indignation when a Negro is lynched in Mississippi, but will be equally incensed when a Negro is denied the right to live in his neighborhood, or join his professional association or secure a top position in his business.”

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Address to the Golden Anniversary Conference of the National Urban League, New York City, September 6, 1960

On the bus ride, the emotions of their experience fueled robust conversation. “How many beatings will you be able to take as a *white* participant?” “Are you willing to put your life on the line?”¹⁵ Seconds turned into minutes and minutes into hours as the college students, black and white, listened carefully to each other’s responses surrounding race and the politics of sacrifice. They wrestled with the potential limitations of the ideal, northern liberalism Dr. King defined to the National Urban League Conference in 1960.

¹⁵ William Chafe, interview with author, December 9, 2013.

The students who arrived in two busloads to Montgomery, Alabama from New York one Friday afternoon in March 1965 responded to the call for northern civil rights advocacy. Some were experienced civil rights workers and most were characterized as “uninvolved community people.”¹⁶ These students, despite their varying connections to the movement, did not view their experience level as a barrier from leaving their college dorms for a weekend to stimulate the “beginnings of a political voice for Negroes there.”¹⁷ “They had traveled for more than 24 hours to assist in the logistical planning of the Selma to Montgomery March. After “stirring up freedom” in the city, where the nation, ten years prior, had witnessed the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the students used their newly gained exposure to political oppression and violence to question how far they were willing to travel for democracy.

The image of northern students travelling to the South, acquiring a southern political education and challenging their own biases and assumptions as liberals serves as a framework to understand the founding and initial mission of the Northern Student Movement. While one participant in the bus ride described his experience as “powerful”¹⁸ and enlightening, conversations surrounding race and sacrifice became critical to students’ involvement in the civil rights movement.

This chapter, then, is the starting point to uncover the blueprint of the Northern Student Movement, one designed with the organizing tradition of the southern movement while crafted to the North’s racial situation. It discusses how young, northern college students in the early 1960s studied the field of student radicalism before using lessons of citizenship and democracy to become involved in the northern freedom struggle. Particularly, the chapter establishes that the

¹⁶ NSM Press Release, NSM Papers.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Chafe, interview with author, December 9, 2013.

Northern Student Movement's later evolution into an urban community organization could not have taken place without this southern education. Before we can arrive to the final destination, we must begin at the loading station.

The year 1960 was on the cusp between the civil rights *struggles* that began as early as Reconstruction and the nonviolent, direct action campaigns that would become central to the progress and direction of the civil rights *movement* of the 1960s.¹⁹ Undoubtedly, the sit-ins conducted on February 1, 1960 by four African-American college students at the Woolworth's store in Greensboro, North Carolina inspired a wave of sit-in movements across the South. An inflection point in American history, the sit-ins, deemed "bigger than a hamburger", gave birth to the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, commonly referred to as SNCC.²⁰ On Easter weekend, April 1960, students gathered at Shaw University to declare their continuation of a "college-based activism"²¹ whose purpose challenged Jim Crow while "affirming the philosophical or religious ideal of nonviolence as the foundation of [their] purpose, the presupposition of [their] belief, and the manner of [their] action."²²

SNCC's engagement with the Freedom Rides of 1961 significantly influenced the evolution of the southern movement. In 1961, the Supreme Court outlawed segregation in interstate bus terminals and students desired to know if the de jure worked de facto. Teaming up with the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), a coalition of civil rights groups, SNCC students

¹⁹ Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *Organization of American Historians* 91, no.4: (March 2005), 1233-1263.

²⁰ Protestors Recall Success of 1960 Sit-Ins: Museum Opens on Site of Segregated N.C. Lunch Counter Where 4 Young Men Changed History by Sitting in "Whites Only" Section," February 1, 2010. *CBS News*. And Ella Baker, "Bigger than a Hamburger", Address to Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, April 1960.

²¹ Iwan Morgan and Phillip Davies, eds., *From Sit-Ins to SNCC: The Student Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012), 8.

²² Founding Statement of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, April 17, 1960.

sought to capture the nation's attention once again after the sit-ins lessened over the prior year. A refusal to "ride Jim Crow", black and white students boarded the bus from the nation's northern capital, Washington, D.C., to the South's New Orleans for the first Freedom Ride in May 1961. The integrated teams' bravery and democracy generated white mob violence. The bus came to a halt in Birmingham as men "brandishing baseball bats, bottles, and lead pipes" ran towards them yelling, "Get those niggers!"²³ The Freedom Riders' willingness to put their bodies on the line for racial justice showed the strength of their commitment to the freedom struggle.²⁴ Furthermore, their defiance of federal authority to pursue basic constitutional rights while framing their resistance in the context of non-violence and equality became the foundation of SNCC's activities in the 1960s.

SNCC's leadership structure set the organization apart from other civil rights organizations like Dr. King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). These organizations depended on a few, elite circle leaders such as Dr. King, Wyatt Walker and Ralph Abernathy in SCLC. On the other hand, SNCC depended on the consultation and leadership of the ordinary men and women of the communities they worked in. SNCC's *modus operandi* was "*group-centered leadership, rather than a leader centered group pattern of organization.*"²⁵ The community mobilizing tradition, central to black activism especially in the Mississippi

²³ Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-1963* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 446.

²⁴ Raymond Arsenault, *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the struggle for racial justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 6.

²⁵ Ella Baker, "Bigger than a Hamburger." April 4, 1960.

Movement, historian Charles Payne asserts was “a tradition with a different sense on what freedom means.”²⁶

The decision for SNCC to engage in less confrontational direct action and voter education programs directly stemmed from their goals to organize ordinary people. At first, SNCC students remained conflicted over whether to engage in direct action or voter registration efforts in Mississippi. In the direct action camp, students argued that events like the sit-ins and Freedom Rides were more “spiritually empowering” compared to voter registration. On the other end of the spectrum, some students advocated for voter registration projects because they could generate political power in the Delta where less than 2% of black Mississippians were registered to vote.²⁷ Ella Baker, the mother of SNCC, informed the students they did not have to choose; voter registration and non-violent direct action, she believed, complemented each other and would stir up the same kind of violence.²⁸ Soon, students were on their way to McComb, Mississippi.

McComb was SNCC’s training ground for future organizing activity in the Delta. Working with local leaders through an NAACP chapter, Bob Moses and other SNCC students set up a voter registration school in the first week of August 1961. The school focused on literacy and the specific voting process in Mississippi due to the state’s rigorous 21-question test for black voters. After accompanying three black residents to the courthouse to register to vote, Moses was arrested and spent the night in a Mississippi jail. In the coming weeks, Freedom Riders of SNCC, who initially desired to remain engaged in direct action campaigns, made their

²⁶ Charles Payne, *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 3.

²⁷ Payne, 1.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 111.

way to McComb and began teaching workshops on nonviolent direct action.²⁹ As SNCC's activities grew in size and scope, so too did the horrific violence leading to the killing of Herbert Lee. The students, however, remained determined. They learned that they could work with local black residents and stir up democracy. This motivation caught the attention of those who sought to "evangelize the world." The Student Christian Movement of New England thought it was time to get involved.³⁰

Students began building bridges between the North and South and in a migratory pattern, transported the southern movement and experience into the northern imagination.³¹ Through travel and conversation, like that of the NSM's bus ride from New York to Montgomery in 1965, northerners began to think of ways in which they could support the movement and perhaps work in the North to secure voting rights, equitable housing, and other issues that characterize the more institutional racism of the North.³² In June 1961, the bridge between the North and South strengthened as members of the Student Christian Movement of New England (SCM) listened to Dr. John Maguire, a white professor at Wesleyan University and Marian Wright, a black Yale Law student, discuss their Freedom Rides and sit-in experiences.

²⁹ Ibid., 118-119.

³⁰ The Student Christian Movement of New England was part of a larger network of Christian movements among students in different parts of the world to advance the Christian church. There are varying names in different countries such as the World Student Christian Freedom or the World Council of Churches. When I use SCM, I'm referring to the Student Christian Movement of New England and more so the branch that existed in New Haven, Connecticut

³¹ Wesley Hogan, *Many Minds, One Heart: SNCC's Dream for a New America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 100.

³² Martha Biondi, *To Stand And Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003) and Jeanne Theoharris and Komozi Woodard eds. *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South, 1940-1980* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

The Northern Student Movement grew out of the SCM's meeting with the Freedom Riders. Speaking "on the dynamics of racial discrimination", the invited guests most likely framed their stories in a manner that linked the Christian conscience and the movement as an attempt to reaffirm morality in human nature.³³ SCM resonated with their guests' powerful stories because SCM's mission and purpose called them to a Christian awakening and missionary service. As the "church ahead of the church", the SCM sought a religious experience that could bring Christians together by engaging in cross-cultural and societal issues especially in the university setting.³⁴ Believing the student movement was an avenue to accomplish God's mission, the SCM of New England appointed a Civil Rights Commission to investigate the ways in which they could become involved. Peter Countryman was the prophet they called on to lead their mission.

A bright-eyed, white undergraduate at Yale University, Peter Countryman identified with the southern movement because of its "spiritually purifying aspects."³⁵ The church became an important part of his life while he grew up in Chicago. He found refuge in the church community from his mother's struggle with alcoholism.³⁶ Embracing the social gospel, Countryman often participated in community service activities with the local Boys' Club. During the summer of his freshman year, he worked in the West Side of Chicago in a church program. There, he

³³ Student Christian Movement, "Commendation by the 1961 O-At-Ka Conference to SCM Regional Council", SCM Papers, Box 50, Folder 601.

³⁴ Robin Boyd, *The Witness of the Student Christian Movement: Church ahead of the Church* (London: SCPK Publishing, 2007), 1-24.

³⁵ Wesley Hogan, *Many Minds, One Heart: SNCC's Dream for A New America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 100.

³⁶ Joan Countryman, interview with author, January 28, 2014.

“experienced the sense of the kind of deprivation that occurred near his own city.” Thus, his involvement with SCM was not merely coincidental.³⁷

Countryman traveled extensively between the North and the South. He met with campus leaders, civil rights organizers, and community leaders to see how a “Yalie” like him could support the southern movement. Early on, he met mentors like John Lewis of SNCC, who gave him direction on potential organizing strategies.³⁸ Countryman did not merely travel between networks of civil rights activists but he also gave himself to the struggle. In one letter to his comrades in the South, he casually wrote that he had spent the night in jail.³⁹ Despite his interests in the southern movement, Countryman believed that racial issues pervaded what seemed to be the liberal North. “The person he was said,” Joan Countryman recalled, “I know that here in New Haven and Chicago...they pretend to have solved this problem [but] they have not begun to tend to what needs to be done.”⁴⁰

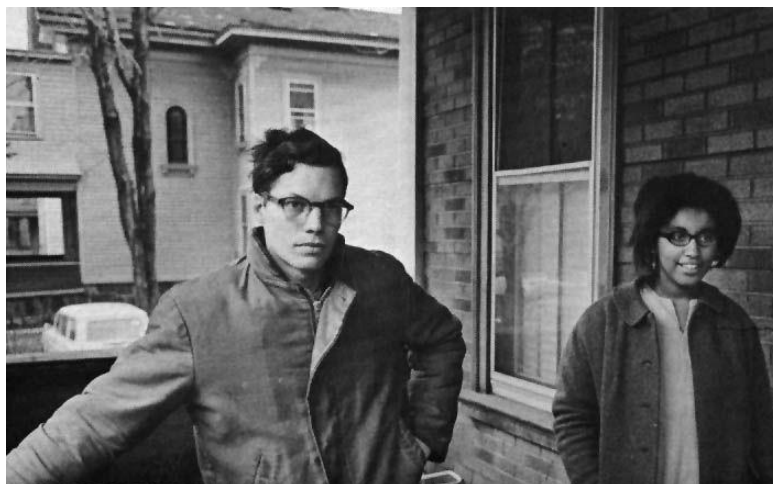
Acting swiftly, Countryman in coordination with SNCC, SCM, and other liberal collegiate groups organized the NSM’s Founding Conference in 1962 at Sarah Lawrence College. Joan Countryman, a Philadelphia native and the black student body president at Sarah Lawrence, remembered that her constituents also wanted to get involved in civil rights. The students reached out to the SCM students. “We also said let’s have a conference because that would be a way to get the SNCC people to come and be involved.” Thus, in April 1962, the Intercollegiate Conference on Northern Civil Rights brought together three-hundred delegates from sixty colleges. Together, these students comprised an interracial cohort who had an interest

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Letter from Countryman to James Forman, April 1961, SNCC Papers, Reel 8.

⁴⁰ Joan Countryman, interview with author, January 28, 2014.



Joan and Peter Countryman, 1965. In author's possession.

in civil rights. While Joan Countryman did not attend the conference, she would meet her future husband, Peter Countryman, there. Although she was “not impressed” on first look, Joan Countryman believed Countryman’s leadership style was noteworthy.⁴¹

Joan Countryman recalled that the conference was designed to present America’s racial problem as a national one rather than a solely southern problem.⁴² As the first graduate of the Germantown Friends School in Philadelphia, Joan understood the implications of race in the North. Not only was she the first graduate, but she was the only black student to attend the school in 1958. “I was the racial experience for everybody,” she remembered. Although Germantown was a racially integrated neighborhood, blacks and whites seemingly lived in different worlds. Moreover, northern racial tensions, often went unnoticed by whites. In the second grade at another school, Joan and her best friend outpaced the other students in her reading group. The teacher’s response surprised her. The teacher, who was white, “did not know

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Joan Countryman, interview with author, January 28, 2014.

what to do with us. We read ahead in the reader so she had us dust the closets. That didn't go over too well with my parents," Joan recalled.⁴³ Thus, at the InterCollegiate conference, the conference organizers ensured that students understood the pervasive, but subtle nature of northern racism and discrimination.

Countryman believed the delegates had to understand the southern movement in two ways before they could proceed with their planning on civil rights. First, the delegates, some of whom would later become project leaders in the North, were presented with materials that detailed the structure and leadership style of SNCC. Many of these materials explained how SNCC's southern voter registration campaigns grew out of the students' basic belief that they could make basic change despite of a deeply oppressive system.⁴⁴ Furthermore, their idealism to make change undergirded the realization that mobilizing poor southern black voters could reform the social institutions that were not in their favor. On the other hand, while NSM students had to take individual responsibility to fight against racial oppression, they had to avoid a "paternal benevolence."⁴⁵ Black students could lead as well as the local members of the communities they worked in. While planning the conference, Countryman wrote to black SNCC leaders in the South to attend and sit on the panel. He wrote, "In this case, we're somewhat prejudiced against the whites."⁴⁶ The conference speakers included Chuck McDew and Charles Sherrod, the director of SNCC's Southwest Georgia Voter Registration Project. Representatives from the North also served on the panel such as Joan Countryman's uncle, Leon Sullivan, the keynote

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Countryman, Letter to Forman, McDew, Monsonis, March 13, 1962, SNCC Papers, Reel 8.

⁴⁵ "Report on History and Structure of SNCC," SNCC Papers, Reel 8.

⁴⁶ Letter to Forman, McDew, Monsonia, March 13, 1962

speaker.⁴⁷ With additional representation from civil rights groups, ministers, and union leaders, the students also received an education in the problems of the North as well. The northern and southern brethren now formed an integrated coalition that believed the North's and South's problems could be solved with a young, committed leadership dedicated to ending racial conflict and discrimination.

The NSM led a successful financial campaign for the South. At the conference, delegates decided that the NSM's initial goal was "to provide an immediate opportunity for support-moral, physical, and financial of the Southern student movement."⁴⁸ James Forman, a SNCC organizer and eventual NSM mentor said, they needed "to man the supply lines---that means money, man."⁴⁹ Funds collected through the loose coalition of campus organizations, the base of the Northern Student Movement, were directed towards voter registration in Mississippi. SNCC also received funding for office supplies like tape recorders, projectors, and mailing machines.⁵⁰ Countryman, however, wanted to do more.

Countryman's later research and vision for the NSM stemmed out of long, thoughtful conversations through correspondence with SNCC organizers surrounding SNCC's voter registration campaigns and leadership program. McDew and Tom Hayden provided reports of SNCC's voter registration project in McComb, Mississippi, which often detailed white resistance to SNCC's efforts. More important, Tim Jenkins, a black Yale law student, also abandoned his studies for the southern cause and provided Countryman with a SNCC education that detailed the history and structure of the organization. Structure was important to how SNCC operated

⁴⁷ Sullivan had begun selective patronage campaigns in New York as early as the 1940s and later developed the "Sullivan Principles" for corporate companies to divest from South Africa in the 1970s. Further details in Chapter 2.

⁴⁸ The Northern Student Movement Coordinating Committee, November 10, 1961. SNCC Papers, Reel 8.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Hogan, 100.

⁵⁰ Letter from Wayne Proudfoot to Peter Countryman, November 10, 1961. SNCC Papers, Reel 8.

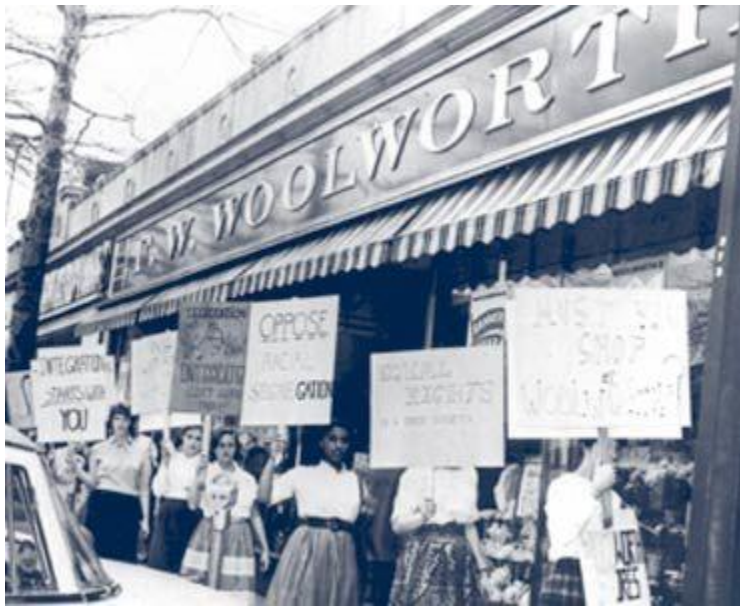
especially in Mississippi and organizers like Jenkins emphasized the unique leadership style of SNCC.

With the new definition of leadership and freedom that his SNCC education had provided him, Countryman and the SCM commission felt confident that they could participate in the movement because northern students had seen the “creative power for social change which reside[d] in their freedom and in their idealism.”⁵¹ Countryman seemed to find a fundamental Judeo-Christian identity in the movement because he identified the “Words” of freedom and idealism in the biblical sense. The “shanty Citizenship schools and the wet cold, Mississippi jails” had made the students witnesses to what seemed as God’s mission to them. In similar fashion to Moses performing God’s command to lead the oppressed out of Egypt, the students would have to adopt this “journey toward freedom...and the reality of individual responsibility.”⁵² To become fully involved, however, those who responded to the call of the South, needed to understand what Countryman called the “implicating factors in such a response.” That is, they had to realize that the journey to the Promised Land would not be easy. Countryman’s reflections struggled with the notion that the NSM would simply provide funds.

While the campus organizations in different cities had begun to educate other students and fundraise, Countryman’s found it to be less meaningful for the progression of the black freedom struggle. Countryman believed northern students, black and white, were not accustomed to engaging in a struggle that was so wearisome and challenging to the core of their beliefs. SNCC workers in Greenwood, Mississippi, for example, registered voters and avoided the Ku-Klux-Klan simultaneously. Many of these students left their college studies like Countryman and

⁵¹ Letter to the Northern Student Movement Coordinating Committee, November 10, 1961.

⁵² Ibid.



Joan Countryman with “Oppose...” sign at Woolworth’s Picket Line near Sarah Lawrence College. 1960. In author’s possession.

in many cases were putting their lives on hold and on the line. The southern story to Countryman was “the story of a personal struggle, of each human being coming to grips alone with the question of submission to that which oppresses him or assertion of his rights in face of that oppression.”⁵³ This was not only an attempt to recruit students but also to expand the narrow sense of politics that students professed.⁵⁴

If northern college students followed the patterns of leadership that SNCC had established in the south and engage in personal struggles, maybe they could successfully address the entirety of America’s racial problem by looking towards the North. “Is it possible...”, Countryman asked, “...that there could be a student protest movement in the North, tied to that of the South, which could bring home to this society the basic falsity in its interrelationship and

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Wesley Hogan, “Radical Manners:” The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the New Left in the 1960s vol.1,” Ph.D. dissertation, 2000, pg. 231.

create in turn an actualization of the democratic ideas which it professes?”⁵⁵ In other words, could the southern movement serve as a blueprint for the NSM’s activities in the north where the racial problem existed without the formal structure of Jim Crow?

The NSM moved away from fundraising into non-violent direct action. Shortly after the conference, students from the New York branch of the NSM picketed an apartment complex in Rye, New York.⁵⁶ A landlord refused to rent the apartment complex to the Reds, a black family. The family appealed but it was “bogged down” in the courts. Braving a crisp, chilly day, 100 NSM students set up picket lines and by August the family had secured housing. While the legal battles and protests had resulted in a positive outcome, the “absurdity of this form of discrimination and its close relationship to the slums of New York City struck home” allowed students to get in the guts of the situation they were now battling.⁵⁷ In postwar New York City, African-Americans often faced obstacles in securing decent and affordable housing because of a growing population coupled with a stagnant housing supply.^{58 59} Areas often became overcrowded because of a housing industry based on ideas of racial differences. Housing discrimination in Rye and Harlem was racial segregation in informal, lawful, and open in practice. The NSM leaders and campus volunteers alike began to realize that the problems “up north” were similar to “down south” as housing in the south was also substandard but in the north substandard and racially divided.

⁵⁵ Countryman, “The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee,” Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, Reel 8.

⁵⁶ Northern Student Movement, “NSM News,” October 19, 1962, Folder 8, Box 10, NSM Papers, Schomburg.

⁵⁷ Countryman, *Student and Race in the North*

⁵⁸ Biondi, 112-114.

⁵⁹ Postwar referring to “after World War II”

The development of the Eastern Shore Project served as a new approach to address the heart of the problems the NSM volunteers experienced. In the fall of 1961, the NSM and the Baltimore Civic Interest Group sent students to sit-in on the Eastern shore of Maryland. The students, black and white, targeted restaurants that discriminated against African-Americans. Similar to the Greensboro sit-ins in February 1960, the Nashville movement, and other southern sit-ins, the Eastern shore sit-ins demonstrated that they had adopted the method of non-violent protest to challenge blatant forms of discrimination. One student recalled that, “a mob of white people gathered and shouted at us waving sticks.”⁶⁰ However, there were deeply entrenched problems that were “bigger than a hamburger”. After reviewing numerous data, they found that the employment structure was segregated with respect to economic class with a majority of blacks working as domestics and unskilled laborers. Housing, education, and recreational facilities were inferior and segregated but black voters had little political power to do so. In five of eleven counties, blacks were not registered to vote. Furthermore, blacks registered as Republicans in a blue state where issues and elections were won by the Democratic Party.⁶¹ The situation, then, needed reform on another level.

In October 1962, the group decided to coordinate programs which would counter the problems the areas faced. Each summer, interracial teams worked with local communities in Easton, Cambridge, and Chestertown on voter registration. This gave the communities a sense of agency as well as the ability to carry out the project after the students departed. The leaders of the NSM believed this was a more effective approach for the personal and institutional change in the North.

⁶⁰ Quoted from Wesley Hogan, “How Democracy Travels: SNCC, Swarthmore Students, and the Growth of the Student Movement in the North, 1961-1964” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 126 no. 3, July 2002.

⁶¹ Letter from Countryman to Forman, April 26, 1962, SNCC Papers, Reel 8.

Conclusion

The idea that the struggle for democracy could travel to the north with the importation of the southern movement's blueprint was the foundation of the Northern Student Movement's initial activities. The Freedom Rides, sit-in movement, and the voter registration campaigns in Mississippi carried out by young college students inspired a new generation of college students in the North who believed they too could get involved. Peter Countryman soon realized that fundraising was not enough to defeat the nature of institutionalized racism in the South.

Chapter 2 documents the next phase of the NSM's engagement with the freedom struggle: urban community organizing.

Chapter 2: The Politics of the Community Organizing Tradition, 1962-1964

“Black power does not come out of the sky.”⁶²

-William “Bill” Strickland, Executive Director of the NSM

The NSM made a swift transition into community organizing. After receiving firsthand training and lessons in nonviolent direct action protest in the North, Peter Countryman and other members of the NSM became increasingly convinced that such action would only result in temporary solutions. The sit-ins in the North and South played a critical role in elevating a mainstream civil rights agenda that framed racism and discrimination as public ills remedied by social and legal reform.⁶³ Yet, as the NSM students set out picket lines, they began to see a broader need. As Joan Countryman recalled, they saw “serious problems that the country had to face all over,” in the North as well as the South.⁶⁴ Expanding into urban communities via local projects, the NSM became more than just a support and service wing of the Southern movement. Rather, they became an “agency for social change” whose mission was to bring a “new sense of social, economic, and political awareness” not only to the communities where they worked but also to the national political landscape.⁶⁵

This chapter locates an important shift in the NSM’s approach to the northern civil rights landscape. It documents the NSM’s focus in 1962 on tutorial programs as a program for social change to its adoption of community action programs by 1963. This shift is first fueled by the tensions that arose over the NSM’s first community tutorial program and then by the need to

⁶² William “Bill” Strickland, interview with author, January 30, 2014.

⁶³ Matthew Countryman, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 7.

⁶⁴ Joan Countryman, Interview by author, January 28, 2014.

⁶⁵ Students for a Democratic Society, “The Northern Student Movement: A National Prospectus,” NSM Papers, Box 1, Folder 3.

have local community people more involved in the organizing tradition. The politics of the community organizing tradition then fuels the emergence of black power politics as early as 1963.

At the Inter-Collegiate Conference on Northern Civil Rights in 1962, the students decided that they needed to develop methods to engage critically with the problems in the North. The students desired to come in close contact with urban communities so they could further comprehend the complex results of failed reform. Moreover, the NSM sought to devise a strategy to address the “critical inadequacies” of the urban ghetto.⁶⁶ Countryman received a tip on how to do so from his Yale classmate, a young freshman named Joe Lieberman.⁶⁷

Lieberman suggested a tutoring program. He had grown up in Stamford, Connecticut, attended public schools, and was the first in his family to attend college. When he got to New Haven, he observed that his high school was more racially diverse than Yale.⁶⁸ Joan Countryman recalled that Lieberman believed there should be more students from the inner cities. This clicked for Countryman. His favorite joke to tell “dumbfounded college audiences” on his tours of northern schools was that there were fewer black students at most northern universities than at the University of North Carolina and the University of Mississippi.⁶⁹ Thus, a student-run tutorial program in the inner city could serve a double purpose: 1) to help more students from poor, under resourced schools attend Yale and other northern colleges; and 2) to let Yale students experience firsthand the societal problems the NSM sought to change.

The NSM chose Philadelphia as the laboratory for their first large scale tutorial project. Their decision was strategic. The “City of Brotherly Love”, beginning in the late 1930s, was a

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Joan Countryman, Interview by author, January 28, 2014.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Peter Countryman, “Students and Race in the North,” NSM Papers, Box 1, Folder 17.

Table 1: Philadelphia Population by Race, 1940-1970

Year	Total	White Total	White Percentage	White Percentage Change	Black Total	Black Percentage	Black Percentage Change
1940	1,931,334	1,678,577	86.9	-	250,880	13.0	-
1950	2,071,605	1,692,637	81.7	-.83	376,040	18.2	49.8
1960	2,002,512	1,467,479	73.3	-13.3	529,240	26.4	40.7
1970	1,948,609	1,278,717	65.6	-12.9	653,791	33.6	23.5

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Table 39. Pennsylvania - Race and Hispanic Origin for Selected Large Cities and Other Places: Earliest Census to 1990

haven of civil rights liberalism and progressive politics. In the 1930s, the Philadelphia Chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and white liberal activists from the Protestant and Jewish communities partnered to advance a civil rights agenda in the local and municipal arenas. Progressivism, however, was limited as some white liberals supported such agendas while others supported racial segregation in housing development. The fear of “anti-black sentiment” by white liberals reshaped relationships between other white liberals and blacks such as the Friends Committee on Race Relations, a Quaker agency, and the Race Relations Department of the Protestant Philadelphia Council of Churches. These groups attacked racial segregation head on and brought interracial coalitions together to work on issues such as housing reform. On the other hand, a Left coalition of Communists and African-American groups was wrought with factions.

Civil rights liberalism, however, brought several victories that addressed institutionalized racial inequality. In response to complaints about widespread racial discrimination in the labor market, the Philadelphia Committee on Equal Job Opportunity (CEJO) established a state council for a fair employment practices in commission and in 1948 saw the successful passage of the Fair Employment Practices ordinance that prohibited “any inquiry concerning, or record of the race, color, religion, national origin or ancestry of applicants.” In 1951, the city’s Commission on Human Relations was established to enforce anti-discrimination laws and keep track of complaints. Despite these gains, the racial demographic transition exposed the limited nature of civil rights reform.

Philadelphia experienced the same uneven expansion as other cities in the industrial North. The departure of white workers for the WWII left many industrial, government jobs open for African-Americans. With the city’s new anti-discrimination laws and ordinances, the possibilities seemed endless, and many made their way from the South up to Philadelphia. From 1940 to 1960, the black population grew by almost 300,000 people and increased from 13% to 26.4% of the city’s total population. As black people moved into the city, white Philadelphians moved out decreasing their representation in the city’s total population by 13% (see Table 1). Although attributed to the decline of industrial and manufacturing jobs in the post-war period, patterns of white flight and resistance in the inner-city and suburbs continued to reveal the limits of post-war civil rights liberalism.

The story in suburbia revealed a different approach to the traditional pattern of flight and resistance. Many black families also took advantage of new economic opportunities to move away from the inner city to suburbs. Instead of taking flight, some white community groups, being “well-versed” in post-war liberalism and recent approaches to integration, remained and

seemingly welcomed their African-American neighbors. As Abigail Perkiss observes, there was a gap in understanding what integration meant. “Whereas white homeowners saw living in an integrated community as a way of legitimizing their identities as liberal, urban Americans, black residents overwhelmingly viewed integration as a means toward achieving a set of very tangible material conditions.”⁷⁰ In a show of restrained neighborliness, white homeowners used what Matt Delmont and other historians have referred to as “defensive localism.” This was the practice and language by which white homeowners fought to protect their property value as a front for control over the monoracial identity of their neighborhoods.⁷¹ For example, the *American Bandstand* television program that drew the city’s teenage crowd, chose to exclude the city’s black youth from the studio for fear of angering those who lived in the neighborhood where the station was located. Thus, the show itself contributed to the de facto segregation in the form of a defensive localism that liberal initiatives like the Commission on Human Relations failed to address. When the Countrymen arrived in Philadelphia, there was a burgeoning local movement that turned away reliance on the old liberal coalitions.

Reverend Dr. Leon Sullivan, the keynote speaker at the NSM’s founding conference and Joan Countryman’s uncle, led a community struggle in Philadelphia that had begun early as the 1940s. Beginning in June 1960, Rev. Sullivan and African-American ministers in Philadelphia referred to as the “400 Ministers” organized a boycott of businesses that placed their black employees in menial jobs or refused to hire black and other minority workers. Taking gospel activism to the pulpit, Sullivan and the ministers spoke about God and then focused on a new

⁷⁰ Abigail Perkiss, “Managed Diversity: Contested Meanings of Integration in Post-WWII Philadelphia.” *Journal of Urban History* 38, no. 3 (May 2012), 410-429,

⁷¹ Matt Delmont, “Making Philadelphia Safe for “WFIL-adelphia”: Television, Housing, and Defensive Localism in Post-War Philadelphia, *Journal of Urban History* 38, no. 1, 89-113.



Reverend Dr. Leon Sullivan announces the opening of the Opportunities Industrialization Center in 1964.
Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives.



A tour group listens to their tour guide, Reverend Dr. Leon Sullivan, on details surrounding the Progress Industrial Park, September 23, 1972. *Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives.*

approach to the city's failed liberal institutions. A Baptist preacher, Sullivan "could really go at it" and "once he got going...his speeches like sermons...[became] carefully crafted arguments."⁷² The plan, he told his congregation, was for the ministers to approach the local companies where evidence of black employment discrimination existed and make an attempt to negotiate. If the companies did not negotiate, the ministers would return to the pulpit to demand that their congregation refuse to buy the company's products. The TastyKake Baking Company was not friendly toward the beloved community and launched a campaign defending their employment practices. Immediately, Sullivan and the ministers returned to the pulpit and declared that TastyKake would be the target of their first selective patronage campaign.

⁷² Joan Countryman, interview with author, January 28, 2014.

The TastyKake campaign was a teachable moment for the NSM, grounding them on how to build a local movement, and the challenges and triumphs of doing so. The Countrymans received a lesson on the nature of de facto racial discrimination. TastyKake employed black workers in large numbers but men and women alike worked in low-paying, non-clerical positions; black women began and ended their work day in segregated locker rooms.⁷³ The five point list of demands that Sullivan and the ministers presented was based on the premise that TastyKakes were a popular treat in the black community and were sold in almost every black-owned corner shop in Philadelphia's black neighborhoods. Therefore, if the black community was making profits, then more jobs or resources should move back in. Joan thought the argument "a nice one to...make about any industry" because there were numerous opportunities African-Americans could have access to but were prevented from taking advantage of them.⁷⁴ Black store owners were responsive and joined the ministers in "controlling the consumption patterns of the congregation" by placing signs outside of their storefront and ceasing the placement of TastyKake products on their shelves. Two months later, TastyKake began to employ more black people, hire more drivers, and desegregate clerical positions, as well as locker rooms. "The president called me and said, "Reverend tell them colored people to eat TastyKake again," Sullivan later recalled.⁷⁵

Victory tasted sweet, and in its wake "black people were walking ten feet tall in the streets of Philadelphia."⁷⁶ The buying power of black Philadelphians, who comprised twenty percent of consumers in the city, could not be ignored.⁷⁷ Not only had the ministers succeeded in

⁷³ See *Up South*, 102-105.

⁷⁴ Joan Countryman, interview with author.

⁷⁵ Reverend Dr. Leon H. Sullivan, interview with Singleton, n.d.

⁷⁶ Quoted from *Up South*, 105.

⁷⁷ Reverend Dr. Leon H. Sullivan, interview with Singleton, n.d.

their efforts, but the black working class, who were considered incapable in addressing their community concerns, had succeeded in crumbling institutional discrimination as an alternative to depending on the “cultivation of white liberal allies.”⁷⁸

The NSM also realized that the church was a base on which they would ultimately have to rely on to seek civil rights progress in the city. Just three years prior, the Philadelphia NAACP led efforts to negotiate with TastyKake and had not succeeded. Now, similar to the southern movement, ministers led an intertwined network of the black working class, the black middle class and community activists that could be mobilized to take part in local civil rights protest.

The consumerist activism led by the black ministers was a demonstration of what Michael Dawson terms community nationalism. Community nationalism as a form of black nationalism “incorporates the concept [of] black autonomy and includes the concepts of self-determination [and] black control of political and economic organizations.”⁷⁹ The consolidation of black spending power to gain civil rights shifted the “physical locus of civil rights from Center City office buildings where integration seemed a reality to all-black churches, civic groups, and neighborhoods.”⁸⁰ Black Philadelphians resonated with this style of protest because the intra-racial coalition of ministers, local community organizations, and businesses emphasized the strength and potential of black coalitions to counter privilege and gain civil rights.⁸¹ It was a clear, effective alternative to the interracial, white majority coalitions that had ruled the city’s government and liberal agenda in the past.

⁷⁸ *Up South*, 105.

⁷⁹ Michael Dawson, *Black Visions: The Roots of Contemporary African-American Political Ideologies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 101.

⁸⁰ *Up South*, 118.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

Table 2: The Black Population in North Philadelphia, 1950-1960

YEAR	BLACK POPULATION	PERCENTAGE OF NEIGHBORHOOD POPULATION
1950	164,107	45
1960	215,554	69

In consideration of the lessons they were learning, the NSM sought support for their new agenda, the Philadelphia Tutorial Project (PTP). It was relatively easy for the young students to do so. Not only had they developed a “positive, internal” movement but Reverend Sullivan now sought to address educational inequities and shift the ministers’ focus from selective patronage to self-help.⁸² The boycott campaigns were successful but black workers lacked the skills required by various industry employers. “Integration without preparation led to frustration,” Sullivan later recalled.⁸³ Along with the training program and center he opened, he believed the implementation of a full scale tutorial project could provide the necessary training and educational preparation so that black youth could reap the gains made from the boycott campaigns. While one of Sullivan’s goals was to create a sense of independence for the black community, he also believed the NSM, despite the interracial nature of its work, could be of great benefit to the campaigns’ goals. However, “he made it clear that they must work under and behind the existing leadership.”⁸⁴

North Philadelphia was a perfect location for the three-pronged approach of education, housing, and employment that the NSM decided to utilize, as well as a site of bustling black civil

⁸² Countryman, *Students and Race in the North*,” NSM Papers, Box 1, Folder 17 and Countryman’s *Up South*, 110.

⁸³ V.P. Franklin, “The Lion of Zion”: Leon H. Sullivan and the Pursuit of Social and Economic Justice: Introduction”, *The Journal of African American History*, 1, no.1 (Winter 2011), 39-43.

⁸⁴ Peter Countryman, “Students and Race in the North,” NSM Papers, Box 1, Folder 17.

rights activity. First, educational outcomes for black students spurred alarm and concern. According to a *Philadelphia Tribune* column, less than half of the students completed high school and their college attendance rate was low.⁸⁵ Crowded, segregated schools contributed to the 60% high dropout rate, school discipline issues, and a 2.5% college attendance rate.⁸⁶ North Philadelphia was one of the city's most residentially segregated areas, with more than half of the black population living in close proximity to one another. With the tutorial program, the aim was to show that poverty and poor educational success were not endemic to the black community and prove they could successfully mobilize and reverse the seemingly insurmountable challenges.

Despite Joan Countryman's personal and family connections to the city, the NSM were outsiders and, as such, it was imperative that they speak with community organizers first. Similar to SNCC organizers in the South, the Countrymans engaged in the "slow and respectful work"⁸⁷ of the organizing tradition. Joan Countryman recalled that the "SNCC model was a model for everybody"⁸⁸ especially the early NSM staff because it emphasized black, indigenous leadership as opposed to all-white leadership structures and white-majority-led coalitions between blacks and whites, which Peter Countryman especially feared. The local movement in Philadelphia was already based on black communal strength and the NSM's desire was to support such organization rather than interfere with it.

Reverend Sullivan facilitated the local organizing tradition with the NSM. He began by taking them to the meetings of black preachers in Philadelphia. There, the Countrymans outlined

⁸⁵ Stay-Cee Hibbett, *Philadelphia Tribune*, October 30, 1962.

⁸⁶ Peter Countryman, "The Philadelphia Experiment," *Student Community Involvement*, n.d.

⁸⁷ Charles Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 264.

⁸⁸ Joan Countryman, interview with author, January 28, 2014.



“Mrs. Alice Beaver, Tioga Church elder, serves dessert to tutorial project leaders Joan Cannady, Sarah Lawrence College graduate, and Peter Countryman, a director of the Northern Student Movement. Concerned that young people were not eating properly, Tioga women and others involved with Youth Target program cooked an occasional dinner for the group.”

Presbyterian Life, 1962.

their proposal for the tutoring program and asked for community spaces to hold the tutoring sessions. The preachers, although conservative, gave their approval and provided Sunday school buildings and classrooms across the city. Charles Payne argues that this first step was central. “By demonstrating that they could live up to the values the community respected, organizers legitimized themselves, and their program.”⁸⁹ In many ways, the initial contact between the community and the NSM, affirmed the adaptation of black traditions of community and local autonomy which would later be critical elements in the development of black power.

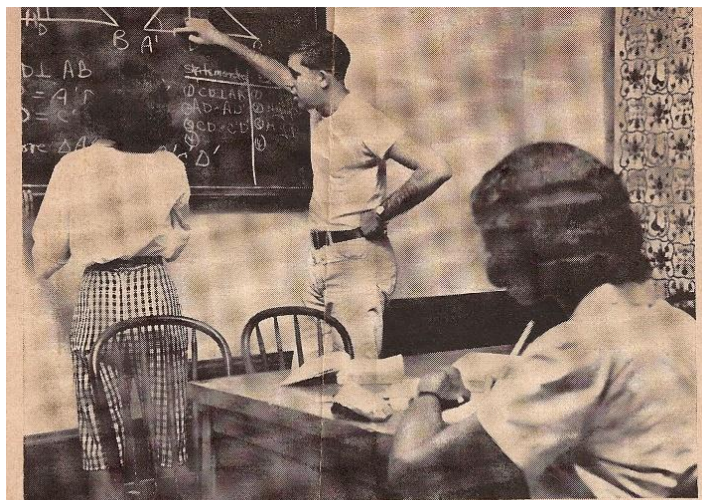
⁸⁹ Payne, 243.

Tutoring Session



TEMPLE STUDENT Gwendolyn Howell discusses the fine points of algebra with Philadelphia Tutorial Project students Lenora Patterson and Barbara Green, both of whom attend Overbrook High School.

Tutoring Session, *Philadelphia Tribune*, June 8, 1963.



Girls aspiring to qualify for college entrance concentrate on problem in geometry explained by Morton Levine, student in Temple University School of Dentistry.

Tutor and tutees in the Tioga United Presbyterian Church, *Presbyterian Life*, 1962.

The approval of community leaders sealed the deal and the NSM immediately began their recruiting efforts. The NSM volunteers travelled in “coordinating committees” to northern liberal arts colleges like Connecticut College and Wellesley College.⁹⁰ In their recruitment sessions, Joan Countryman and other members struck a bargain with students asking: “When you go home this summer, why don’t you sign up to help with the tutoring program? We could help you find jobs so you can support yourself and do this tutoring as volunteer work.”⁹¹ In Philadelphia, the Countrymans took advantage of their family network. Joan Countryman’s father, a well-connected educator and board member of the Philadelphia Tutorial Project reached out to other counselors, and they recommended students for the program. “It was a huge organizing challenge,” Joan Countryman remembered, but the wide support, moral and financial, was

⁹⁰ Joan Countryman, interview with author, January 28, 2014.

⁹¹ Ibid.

reassuring to the young organizers. They received a \$2,000 grant from the Fels Foundation and grants in other amounts from the Philadelphia Foundation, the Dolfinger-McMahon Foundation, and the Committee on Human Relations. In addition, the group received smaller donations from “churches, organizations, and individuals in sympathy with NSM’s objectives.”⁹² With their headquarters on 1830 North Park Avenue at Temple University, 175 college volunteers, 375 high school students, and nineteen churches, the NSM launched their first experiment in local grassroots democracy.⁹³

In July 1962, the program was launched across North Philadelphia. After working at their summer jobs throughout the city, tutors returned to work with their tutees on a wide range of subjects. They also attended concerts, ballgames and church together. Not only were the college tutors and tutees from the local community coming together but also present were the twenty-three college students, an interracial group, who were chosen to administer the program that summer. Such engagements brought communities that had not previously been in contact with close contact with one another that Countryman assessed as a feature of American race relations that revealed the “alienation of the Negro ghetto from the flow of American society.”⁹⁴

The program received praise from across the spectrum by participants, community members, and city officials. The *Tribune* called it an “unspectacular movement” that approached the educational problem in a spectacular way while “marching towards first class citizenship.”⁹⁵ An editorial in the *Evening Bulletin* referred to the tutorial project “a new and most appealing experiment in interracial cooperation” while Pennsylvania’s governor remarked that “there can

⁹² *Presbyterian Life*, 1962, pg.32

⁹³ Peter Countryman, “The Philadelphia Experiment,” *Student Community Involvement*, n.d.

⁹⁴ Peter Countryman, “Students and Race in the North,” NSM Papers, Box 1, Folder 17.

⁹⁵ Philadelphia Tribune, August 31, 1962.



Peter Countryman and Student Pose at PTP
Closing Ceremony

be little doubt that a great deal of good has been accomplished.”⁹⁶ However, behind the limelight, the twenty-three students who administered the project that summer began the nitty gritty conversations that exposed the conflicts of interracial movement work, its structure and mission.

Joan Countryman remembered that conflict and disagreement lived among the twenty-three students in the staff house. The group of white and black students had not “clicked very much,” she recalled.⁹⁷ There were conflicts centered on the “specific question...of who should be doing what...and “what it meant to have white kids in the neighborhood.”⁹⁸ For a community that had embraced black leadership and reduced its sense of dependency on white coalitions, the NSM’s work, for some students, seemed like a contradiction in terms.

⁹⁶ Stay-Cee Hibbett, *Philadelphia Tribune*, October 30, 1962.

⁹⁷ Joan Countryman, interview with author, January 28, 2014.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

First, there was general disagreement on which students to tutor. While most students had expressed interests in the program, some were on the edge of being high school dropouts while others performed well academically. The black college students often questioned what it meant for white tutors to help black students achieve academic success. For many, it seemed to reinforce the idea that blacks could only progress with white support. Moreover, the question of encouraging students to attend predominantly white colleges rather than historically black colleges was contentious. If black students left their neighborhoods to attend predominantly white institutions, it could lead to the potential removal of indigenous leadership, students argued and a sentiment Peter later expressed.⁹⁹ Rather than leave their communities behind, black students might instead channel the civil rights consciousness they learned through their political discussions with their tutors to effect change in the ghetto.

Black organizers and tutors believed that the PTP reinforced the structural dimension of the racial social code. Charyn Sutton, a black tutor in the PTP and later a volunteer in Boston, expressed concern at what she saw as a paternalistic relationship between the tutor and tutee. “What I saw in the NSM tutorial projects was a lot of white people helping dumb black people.”¹⁰⁰ John Churchville, who would later become the director of the black nationalist Freedom Library in Philadelphia believed that the PTP was “something nice for [tutors] to do on their holidays.” It was a perfect opportunity, Churchville believed, for white students to “go back to their racist lives...feeling good that they helped [those] poor back students.”¹⁰¹ To him, the structure of the PTP was “neocolonialist nonsense” and it became a model of what was wrong with integration and integrationist organizing. “I was offended by the notion that the only way

⁹⁹ Ibid and Peter Countryman, “Students and Race in the North,” NSM Papers, Box 1, Folder 17.

¹⁰⁰ Charyn Sutton, interview with Matthew Countryman. Quoted from Countryman’s *Up South*, 180.

¹⁰¹ John Churchville, interview with author, January 27, 2014.

blacks could develop was by being around white folks.”¹⁰² Such observations by Churchville later factored into his personal decision to have an all-black staff for the Freedom Library Project.

Apart from the relationships between tutors and tutees, black organizers questioned the white tutors’ level of commitment to the freedom struggle. White college tutors were viewed by some as “naïve people” who lacked the knowledge necessary to understand prejudice and racism.¹⁰³ Joan Countryman believed that the college students’ provided a sense of gratification from the tutor-tutee relationship. In her view, some students were “open to learning something and not just simply going and being self-righteous or bountiful.”¹⁰⁴

In response to concerns, NSM leaders developed a more rigorous race and class conscious strategy. They worked hard to recruit students from Cheyney University of Pennsylvania, a local historically black university. When the PTP became a full-time program, students were recruited at Temple University due to its more diverse student body.¹⁰⁵ Opinions were not consistent across the board. Although increasing the presence of black tutors was important, class seemed to be a bigger issue. While black students from schools like Yale, Wellesley College, and Bryn Mawr College might have been comfortable with the tutee relationship, they also might have had a more conservative perspective on the social order, Joan recalled. On the other hand, a black student who might not have attended a private school or an Ivy League university tended to have a deeper and much closer interest in the communities they worked in.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² John Churchville, interview with author, January 27, 2014.

¹⁰³ Joan Countryman, interview with author, January 28, 2014.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.



Students work diligently at the Oakland Study Center, a former barbeque restaurant which parents redecorated. “That They Might Learn,” *Ebony Magazine*, March 1965.



Headquarters of SWAP is upstairs room in Ida Noyes Hall of University of Chicago. Room is plastered with such slogans as “Keep On Pushin’!” and “Freedom Is Not Free.” Slogans suggest SWAP’s concern with social as well as academic problems.

“That They Might Learn,” *Ebony Magazine*, March 1965.

For Peter Countryman, this class distinction served as a priority in conceptualizing the development of black leadership. In his view, members of the black community who received educational opportunities and rose to positions often failed to return to their communities.¹⁰⁷ The PTP fostered indigenous black leadership through providing educational opportunities that are different from those provided state’s school system. By the fall, tutees participated in voter campaigns, clean-up initiatives, and even protests. It was this type of “unpatronizing approach to the problems of the ghetto,” Countryman observed, “[that] evoked a consistent response from many of the tutees.”¹⁰⁸

Marketed as avenues for social change, both for the tutor and tutee, the tutorials expanded to other city projects. By May 1963, the NSM’s local projects reached approximately 3,500 black students through tutorial projects held on weeknights. With growing financial support from

¹⁰⁷ Peter Countryman, “Students and Race in the North,” January 28, 2014.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

organizations like the Taconic Foundation, Fels Foundation, and the Charles E. Merrill Fund, offices opened in in Boston, Hartford, New York City, Philadelphia, Washington, and Chicago. Within each city project, staff members worked with campus organizations, churches, and local organizations to set up tutorials, fundraising campaigns and protest activities.

Quantity also matched quality. In July 1963, for example, the North End Community Action Project, also known as NECAP of Hartford's NSM, called for a boycott of local stores and businesses that refused to hire black employees in "visible" jobs. Similar to Leon Sullivan's selective patronage campaigns, a formidable protest of the black working class against the city's discriminatory forces made a significant impact. They gathered on weeknights and with church leaders voiced, "Amen", in response to their pastor's wishes and declared: "Stop saving your dollars where Negroes do not work. Stop buying your food where Negroes do not work."¹⁰⁹

The progress in community action extended outside of Hartford. Upon administering surveys to local projects, the NSM staff found that the results were "undramatically good." The Philadelphia Tutorial Project reported that of 240 students, 50% of them were "doing a little better" while 41% performed "much better" in their academic studies.¹¹⁰ On the ground tutors also reported individual progress in their tutees. Pearley-May Sampson, a 13-year old, began her stint in the Hartford Tutorial Project with a C average but raised her grade to a B average after several months in the program. In the Harlem Education Project, Carl Anthony, a black tutor and later executive member, helped his tutee raise her third-grade read skills and within two weeks of their sessions, she earned a 90 on a seventh grade spelling test.¹¹¹ These achievements did not go unnoticed.

¹⁰⁹ "Hartford, Connecticut: Boycott is Urged," *The Times-Picayune*, July 15, 1963.

¹¹⁰ Education, "Down to Earth Idealism," *Times*, May 17, 1963, 102.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

In praise for the NSM and in distinction for other civil rights efforts *Time* magazine referred to the NSM's activities as "down to earth idealism." While northern college students attempted to integrate lunch counters and desegregate interstate travel in the South, the students in the NSM engaged in a freedom struggle through a "down to earth student project." The writer praised "Countryman & Co.," writing, "N.S.M. clearly can make only a dent in the great mass of Negro slum kids who consider education strictly square, but it has started something worth doing well."¹¹² Such commentary captured Countryman's goals for the NSM's projects, but such praise also reinforced the patronizing role of "white Lady Bountifulness" that Countryman himself was wary of. By 1963, civil rights forces questioned the role of white activists like Countryman in the movement. Joan Countryman recalled that they began their search for a black director because "there was a need for black leadership for an organization that [focused] on black issues."¹¹³ In addition to the NSM's desire to have a black director, Countryman wanted to return to Yale to complete his studies at Yale and a new member of the Countryman family was on the way. They led a search and eventually found William "Bill" Strickland.

William Strickland's engagement with the questions raised by the movement began long before he joined the NSM. A 24-year old black Harvard graduate at the time, Strickland began his encounter with the NSM when his friend, Sarah Ann Shaw, a Boston volunteer recruited him to Boston's NSM project. His entrance into the movement, however, was unconventional in comparison with his NSM peers. Many northern collegians had travelled "down South" to see SNCC in action and partake in such activity by desegregating lunch counters or being arrested and having overnight stays in Mississippi's and Alabama's jails. Strickland, on the other hand, visited Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina during his time in the Marine Corps. While

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Joan Countryman, interview with author, January 28, 2014.

he escaped Mississippi, he knew that it was notoriously referred to as the “State” for its reputation of being a “paradise” for white intimidation and violence against blacks. In particular, the murder of 14-year old Emmett Till in December 1955 was “the injustice...[and]...the spark” that alerted him to the state of black civil rights in Mississippi. Identifying himself as one of “Till’s contemporaries,” he believed the movement held the possibility to provide access to equal rights for African-Americans. His early political thought was significantly influenced by his childhood friend, Malcolm Little, who became Malcolm X.¹¹⁴

Black nationalism was an essential part of Strickland’s milieu. Growing up in Roxbury, Boston, Strickland met the future leader and minister of the Nation of Islam through his cousin Leslie. He also knew Gene Walcott, later known as Minister Louis Farrakhan.¹¹⁵ The “shiny black jackets embossed with the orange emblem of a black Panther” that Malcolm X wore, made an impression that “stuck with him over the years.”¹¹⁶ His adoration continued when he matriculated to the prestigious Boston Latin School and later to Harvard University. Strickland continued to stay in contact with Malcolm X “crossing paths purposefully and coincidentally” by inviting him to speak at class lectures and arranging interviews for him at Harvard’s radio station.¹¹⁷ He often sought Malcolm’s political perspectives as well on visits to the Nation of Islam’s Restaurant on 116th Street in Harlem. Aside from one-on-one contact with Malcolm X, Strickland was a member of a larger network that was not only influenced by Malcolm but shaped the outward perception and practice of Malcolm and the Nation of Islam.

¹¹⁴ William Strickland, interview with author, January 30, 2014.

¹¹⁵ Minister Louis Farrakhan, upon joining the Nation of Islam quickly rose through the ranks. At the Temple of Islam in Boston, Minister Farrakhan served as Assistant Minister while Malcolm X was minister. After Malcolm X was reassigned to the Temple of Islam on 116th Street in Harlem, NY, Farrakhan became minister. He would later be accused of organizing Malcolm X’s assassination.

¹¹⁶ William Strickland, “Remembering Malcolm: A Personal Critique of Manning Marable’s Non-Definitive Biography of Malcolm X”, The Boggs Blog, May 2012.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

College sharpened Strickland's engagement with black nationalism. His interest grew when he discussed the Nation with C. Eric Lincoln, his graduate seminar classmate and the intellectual historian who had recently penned, *The Black Muslims in America*. As an undergraduate in a graduate seminar, Strickland also discussed the relationship between the black nationalist movement and its relationship to the black freedom struggle for civil rights with Whitney Young, the future head of the National Urban League. The ideas of Malcolm X and his readings of Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, a groundbreaking critique on imperialism and colonization, influenced Strickland's later outlook on the movement and especially his commitment to take the NSM in the direction of a black nationalist tradition.¹¹⁸

Overtime, Strickland developed a philosophy of what he termed left nationalism, one that combined the black socialist and nationalist tradition that Malcolm preached from the mosque and the lectures he gave on 125th Street in Harlem. Strickland recalled that Malcolm X would "make it plain" because his message came without the icing of "mysticism...and propaganda."¹¹⁹ Rather, for his young imagination, Malcolm X "pulled the covers off the concealed dynamic of race and political reality in America."¹²⁰ Such realities stretched beyond US borders, he realized. America's imperial engagements violated human rights abroad, just as the American racial order violated black rights at home. This realization allowed him to understand the magnitude and complexity the racialized situation of poverty and deprivation that existed beyond the Jim Crow South. He later wrote, "In the same way that Karl Marx is the fundamental critic of capitalism,

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ William Strickland, *Malcolm X: Make It Plain* (New York: Penguins Books USA, 1994) and interview with author, January 30, 2014.

¹²⁰ Strickland, *Malcolm X: Make It Plain*, 3.

and Frantz Fanon is the fundamental critic of colonialism, Malcolm X is the fundamental critic of American racism.”¹²¹

Strickland’s political perspective as a left nationalist did not render him hostile to the NSM’s interracial community organizing. He was impressed by what the NSM’s projects had achieved in two years. First, he saw the strong connection between SNCC’s work in the South and what the students were doing in the North. He admired how the NSM “combined protest against northern discrimination with tutoring black children in urban communities.” Moreover, he was impressed with Countryman’s leadership, despite the rivalry between Harvard and Yale students. Strickland recalled a meeting where Countryman discussed an idea he wanted the NSM to support and approve. Strickland remembered being awe-struck and recalled, “That’s clever as hell!” Putting the old Ivy League rivalry aside, Strickland agreed to take over the reigns as executive director not as a “revelation, super sense of a mission...or as a super involvement that would eat all up [all] his time.”¹²² He would soon discover the tedious nature of community organizing and leading the first national civil rights organization to have an office in Harlem.¹²³

In September 1963, Strickland moved into his new role as executive director and Countryman returned to Yale to complete his senior year. The transition was conducted without “too much angst.” Joan Countryman remembered Strickland as the “best thing” to happen to the NSM because their perspectives were similar and they understood one another.¹²⁴ Furthermore, there was not much change in local project leadership. Their first disagreement, one Strickland remembered as a difference in opinion, was on style and reason. Only a few days on the job,

¹²¹ William Strickland, “Remembering Malcolm: A Personal Critique of Manning Marable’s Non-Definitive Biography of Malcolm X”, The Boggs Blog, May 2012.

¹²² William Strickland, interview with author, January 30, 2014.

¹²³ “Students Working in Harlem,” *New York Amsterdam News*, September 19, 1964.

¹²⁴ Joan Countryman, interview with author, January 28, 2014.

Strickland pointed out the “wrong generalities or specifics” of the NSM’s community organizing strategy, particularly that of the Harlem Education Project and the NSM’s new engagement with rent strikes.¹²⁵

The NSM’s move from white leadership to black leadership also coincided with the transition of its political agenda. More and more, the central leadership of the NSM, as well as their local affiliates, questioned their strategies for developing indigenous leadership to confront local struggles. The primary goal was “personal change in a social context,” Countryman wrote, “providing large numbers of people with the power and a sense of value.” If communities could realize their capacity to influence change, they could understand that they deserved equal access to democracy while simultaneously protesting. The idea of “effective and powerful” masses, not those who were “depersonalized and incapacitated” changing institutions was a critical aspect of black political organization.¹²⁶

The year 1963 provided ample opportunity for the NSM to decide on its blueprint for involving people in a meaningful way while influencing institutional reform. In the spring, the nation saw the rise of mass mobilization campaigns. Birmingham, Alabama attracted national and international attention as media reports revealed the brutality of white violence with pictures of civil rights demonstrators, particularly children, being hosed down and attacked by police dogs in the city’s streets. On August 28, 1963, Dr. King delivered the stirring “I Have a Dream Speech” from the Lincoln Memorial to thousands during the March on Washington and millions around the world. Leaving four little girls dead and civil rights leaders wondering which way to turn in the movement, the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church signaled growing white resistance. In Harlem, which Langston Hughes likened to Birmingham and the black press

¹²⁵ Letter to Comrades from Countryman, October 27, 1963, NSM Papers, Box 1, Folder 7.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

labeled the center of “New York’s racial problem,” rent strikes were becoming a resurgent civil rights tactic and bringing political activity to the busy city streets.¹²⁷

Rent strikes were not new to New York City nor to civil rights protest.¹²⁸ As early as World War I, thousands of tenants felt the pressure of low availability and high demand. They threatened to withhold rent payments until high rent prices decreased. In 1932, *The New York Times* reported that the “communist quarter” in Bronx, composed of 4,000 residents, protested against police because they attempted to evict seventeen families who were on rent strike.¹²⁹ By the end of the 1930s, the Harlem Tenants League joined in coalition with numerous tenant unions and organizations to generate a mass membership of over 30,000 people. In 1954, three Harlem residents were killed in a building fire and the city’s black leaders responded in protest. Adam Clayton Powell, the Congressman who represented Harlem in Washington, called for “a permanent strike wherever there are housing violations.”¹³⁰ The rent strikes continued into the late fifties and attracted the attention of the city’s political forces. By the 1960s, the expansion in number and length of rent strikes by southern migrant Jesse Gray prompted the NSM to engage such activity.

Housing was Jesse Gray’s civil rights issue. Gray moved from Baton Rouge, Louisiana to Harlem in 1952 at the age of 28 and discovered that former southerners were confronting a wide range of housing problems from high rent to rat infestation. He immediately became involved in confronting housing struggles with the Harlem Tenants’ Council with whom he organized two evicted families. His representation of tenants and assistance to them agitated not only landlords

¹²⁷ Gary Gates, “New York’s Racial Problem in 1 Word: ‘Harlem’,” *New Journal and Guide* June 8, 1963 and Langston Hughes, “Racism America’s Dilemma,” *The Chicago Defender*, June 8, 1963.

¹²⁸ Michael Lipsky, *Protest in City Politics: Rent Strikes, Housing, and the Power of the Poor* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1969), 56.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹³⁰ Lipsky, 54.

but the city's bureaucracy. He criticized a landlord for his "cynical boasts to the tenants that they would never force him to repair house." Between 1958 and 1959, he had directed rent strikes in fifteen buildings. He later said, "People ask me why I spend all my time on heat and hot water and I say heat and hot water is the biggest organizing tool we have; it may even kick off the revolution in the ghetto."¹³¹

Strickland and the NSM's central leadership believed the rent strikes had the potential to become the "vehicle by which the "people" became aware of their power."¹³² Gray's organizing techniques, Strickland believed, had great potential for the two-prong strategy of generating indigenous leadership while making change indigenously. As historian Michael Lipsky has noted, rent strikes deployed several tactics. 1) picketing and distributing leaflets, 2) emphasizing the tenant-landlord relationship and the protesting of the tenant against the landlord and 3) petitions to city officials to protect tenants from eviction and 4) lobbying for improved housing conditions.¹³³ These were tasks that housing residents could use to address their concerns while gaining the skills of political protest. The rewards from such protest could then incentivize them to continue protest to influence change at the local and state levels.

Strickland remembered that Gray also taught him an important lesson in his first day on the job as executive director. "What he also did...[was] motivate people to organize themselves because some individuals would contact him and he would tell them to organize everyone else in the building." "Let the people decide" became Strickland's motto. This was also the SNCC motto and he realized why Bob Moses resisted being identified as the "Moses of his people."¹³⁴

¹³¹ Ibid., 57.

¹³² Minutes of NSM Congress, December 17, 1963, NSM Papers, Box 1, Folder 2.

¹³³ Lipsky, 54.

¹³⁴ William Strickland, interview with author, January 30, 2014. Bob Moses was one of the most influential black leaders in the national and local movements. As a SNCC field secretary, he led the Mississippi

The NSM's Harlem Education Project, HEP, could work with tenants in the organization as *organizers* but not necessarily as *leaders*. To Strickland, Harlem was "NSM's Mississippi of the North" and he modeled intervention on the example put forth by Moses and Gray.¹³⁵

As with the Philadelphia project, the HEP emerged out of local consumerist protest tied to national concerns of black economic inequality. Beginning as a storefront on 135th Street, the HEP grew out of a 1961 selective patronage campaign against National Dairy, the maker of Sealtest milk and ice cream. One *Amsterdam News* reporter wrote, "Millions of Negroes in Brooklyn and other parts of New York City drink Sealtest milk and spend millions of dollars...but not a single Negro is employed at the...metropolitan headquarters."¹³⁶ Employment and school segregation mattered but in New York white supremacy was more *de facto* than *de jure* and deeply entrenched specifically because of its slippery informality. Thirty five percent of black New York citizens lived in Harlem, fifty percent of its families lived on public assistance, and eighty six percent of the schools were all-Black. What alerted the NSM was not the homogeneity, rather the low level performance and high rate of dropouts by black students. A vicious cycle of "discrimination, humiliation, and rejection" was occurring in the location in the former mecca Black America.

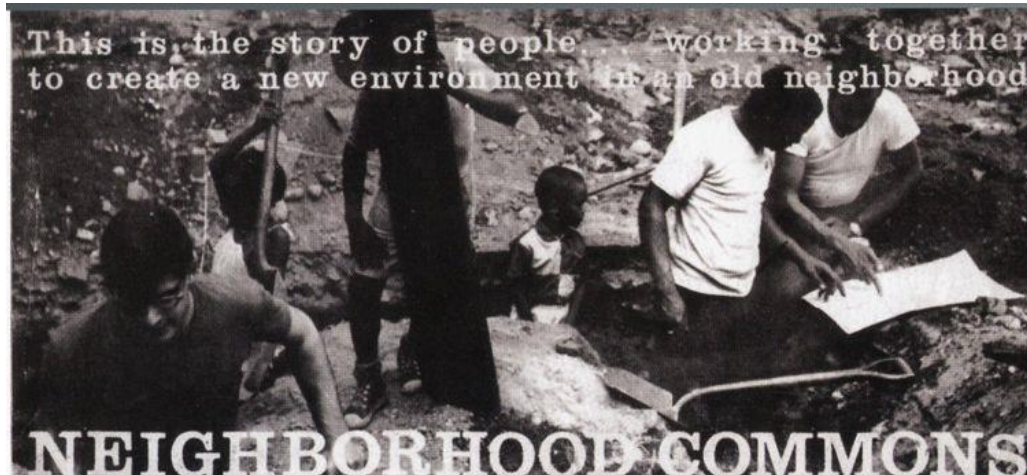
A strategic move, the HEP changed the location of its office in early 1963. "When HEP was on 135th Street, we weren't part of a community. We weren't trying to relate to a neighborhood," Andrea Cousins recalled.¹³⁷ Cousins, the white project director of HEP

Movement beginning in 1961 that focused on voter registration. He later led the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) and played an influential role in the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party.

¹³⁵ Minutes, William Strickland, December 17, 1963, NSM Papers, Box 1, Folder 2.

¹³⁶ Anekwe, Simon. "Probe Milk Firm's Hiring Policies!" *New York Amsterdam News* (1943-1961), Oct 28, 1961.

¹³⁷ Andrea Cousins, interview with author, January 31, 2014.



"This is the story of people...working together to create a new environment in an old neighborhood." *Brochure for Neighborhood Commons Project in Harlem*

beginning in 1962 and Sarah Lawrence graduate, became involved with the NSM after her trip to West Africa through Organizations Crossroads Africa.¹³⁸ Her coming of age coincided with the northern civil rights movement and the African independence movements. Cousins brought a perspective of her community African villages to the HEP as a tutor and later as project director. The NSM, in her view, needed to facilitate a local movement. Hence, the NSM changed location.

When the HEP moved into an apartment building on 147th Street and Eight Avenue, they continued the tutorial project that emphasized a black curriculum with black history and black poetry. Students wrote and edited their own newspaper, the *Harlem Voice*, which not only discussed their participation and activities in the program but also community issues that were of concern. Educational programming continued to remain a prominent feature of HEP's activities but the development of the Neighborhood Commons Project eventually led to the facilitation of resident's direct involvement in city politics.

The Neighborhood Commons Project fostered community involvement to build the base to organize rent strikes and other political activity. Carl Anthony, a black student at Columbia

¹³⁸ Andrea Cousins, interview with author, January 31, 2014.

University's School of Architecture, served as a tutor prior to the launch of the Commons Project. Working with local community people and other architectural students from Columbia, they were able to transform vacant lots into "pocket parks." "Before we came there was an empty lot...[but]...in the commons, people set up workshops in carpentry and electronics," Cousins remembered.¹³⁹ Staff meetings were also held here and community folks were able to attend and discuss their concerns. Soon a local organization called the 147th Street Organization was formed by Chick Bradley, a local resident and community activist.¹⁴⁰

The local representation on the neighborhood organization was also instrumental in setting up a positive relationship whereby local residents had an upper hand in determining how they would react to activities from tutoring to the neighborhood group. With local leadership leading the way, the NSM gained an "organizing technology"¹⁴¹ that allowed poor, black people of the urban community to control their own politics while working with young, college student organizers as *coaches* rather than the "*doers*." There, at the intersection of 147th Street and Eight Avenue, the NSM's organizing tradition began shifting from interracial organizing theory to one that capitalized on the black communal tradition with the NSM taking a back seat.

Adding a community action group to New York City's NSM projects did not happen without debate, but it also had a precedent. "There was always a certain tension between educational work and housing strikes," Cousins recalled.¹⁴² Participating in Jesse Gray's rent strikes on Fifth Avenue and 117th Street, members believed, could distract from Chick Bradley and the 147th Street's activities. The two-pronged approach the NSM's Washington D.C. project,

¹³⁹ Andrea Cousins, interview with author, January 31, 2014.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Jennifer Frost, "An Interracial Movement of the Poor": Community Organizing and the New Left in the 1960s" (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 71.

¹⁴² Andrea Cousins, interview with author, January 31, 2014.

the District Action Project (DAP), employed in the summer of 1963 had the potential to work in New York. After D'Army Bailey, the black project director and his staff saw the "sharp contrast between the inspired tranquility of the monuments" in Washington and the "blatant squalor of the teeming ghettos," they decided that the DAP's tutorial project was practical but insufficient.¹⁴³ Months later, they formed the District Action Racial Equality (DARE) as a separate organization to pursue protest activity. In shared headquarters, Bailey recalled they "moved from working with teenagers to raising hell with the bureaucrats."¹⁴⁴ DARE examined hiring and employment practices while meeting with local residents to hear the community's concerns and complaints leading to a host of responsive agitation by police and city authorities.¹⁴⁵

Inspired by DARE, the NSM formed the Harlem Action Group (HAG) alongside the HEP. While HEP focused on the tutorial project and the Neighborhood Commons Project, HAG took the role of "seeking a greater sense of responsibility on the part of both tenants and landlords."¹⁴⁶ In particular, the HAG set out to work with Gray's Community Council on Housing. Led by Robert "Bobby" Knight, a black organizer and former public school educator, he organized a group of student organizers to encourage residents to protest against their living conditions. After knocking on doors and conducting a housing survey on 2560 Eight Avenue, they found a man by the name of Granville Cherry, an unemployed shipping clerk and chauffeur, and father of six children, from 11 months to 9 years old. Although not a person of high prestige,

¹⁴³ D'Army Bailey. *The Education of a Black Radical: A Southern Civil Rights Activist's Journey, 1959-1964* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 179-184.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Bailey, 184.

¹⁴⁶ "The Northern Student Movement: National Prospectus and Data on Project Cities," NSM Papers, Box 1, Folder 3.

Cherry became the ordinary extraordinary leader who inspired a “new ramification in civil rights activity in the city.”¹⁴⁷

On September 28, 1963, one month after The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, the *New York Times* featured prominently on its cover, “Harlem Tenants Open Rent Strikes: Action in 8th Avenue Building Called Racial Protest on Exploitation by Whites.”¹⁴⁸ The article reported that Mr. Cherry and other tenants dealt with each other on a daily basis. Two months earlier, Mr. Cherry formed a tenants’ council with eight other families that met with the landlords to hear the complaints. However, the landlord “had the halls painted pink and blue but made no other improvements.” Stressing exploitation of minority groups, the article continued to emphasize the deplorable conditions in which Cherry and the other tenants were forced to live. “When a reporter asked him if there were many rats, Mr. Chery snapped off the lights. Within two minutes, four rats appeared on the kitchen floor.”¹⁴⁹

Six of the eight families who lived in the building withheld their \$34.70 monthly rent, leading to a rent strike. James Baldwin, the prominent black writer, hearing of the rent strikes, challenged Harlemites to think of the potential effect on the “white economic power structure” if all Harlem residents refused to pay their residents. Mr. Cherry had already begun to explore the possibilities behind Baldwin’s rhetorical question.

The Eight Avenue rent strike catalyzed more rent strikes, heightened media attention, and increased the city’s response. In October, 150 Harlem residents protested outside of City Council demanding speedier reform in the housing code. By December, the Brooklyn Chapter of the Congress of Racial Inequality (CORE) announced that eleven families were prepared to go on

¹⁴⁷ McCandlish Phillips, “Harlem Tenants Open Rent Strike”, *The New York Times*, September 28, 1963.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ McCandlish Phillips, “Harlem Tenants Open Rent Strike”, *The New York Times*, September 28, 1963.



Major Williams, an organizer, and Alexander Joseph, a tenant, display rats caught in two Harlem tenements to reporters, December 30, 1963, *UPI/Bettmann Newsphotos*.

strike. A meeting between city officials and rent strike leaders without Jesse Gray caused conflict, with Gray accusing a Councilman of being “a scab trying to break the strike.”¹⁵⁰ Still, in that meeting, the city agreed to speed up inspection services. Gray, however, was not satisfied with Governor Rockefeller’s silence on the rent strikes. In January 1964, Gray launched a “Rats to Rockefeller” campaign whereby residents placed toy rats in the mail to represent the housing situation in Harlem.¹⁵¹ Sometimes residents also placed live rats in cages as “show and tell” to communicate the lack of action by city officials. The efforts of a few, ordinary but determined citizens who confronted an unresponsive, liberal establishment spurred responses from city officials and national press attention in the months ahead.

¹⁵⁰ Lipsky, 59.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 71.

When the NSM Congress, including Peter and Joan Countryman, met in January 1964, the first matter of discussion was the rent strikes. Impressed with the outcome, the group acknowledged that much of the success behind the rent strikes derived from the actions of local leaders and residents. After Bayard Rustin and other “resource people” spoke on the implications on the rent strike movement, individuals of the group began to share their sentiments. Q.R. Hand told the group there was a “possibility that the [rent strikes] were the first movement in the North that is not all middle-class.”¹⁵² For Strickland, the proliferation of the rent strikes provided evidence that black Harlem residents would no longer be complacent and unchallenging in face of white landlords’ apathy. “The radical change in the mental of the attitude of the people” offered the key to a “multi-issue, cross-racial, and cross-class lines movement.”¹⁵³

The publicity the rent strikes generated was both beneficial and harmful to the movement the NSM wanted to build. Similar to the response garnered by Eighth Avenue rent strikes in the *New York Times* article, the NSM could gain national publicity.¹⁵⁴ The staff, however, worried about Jesse Gray’s “running of the show.”¹⁵⁵ News media reports revealed that Gray had a tendency to overstate rent strike support and reporters later challenged him to produce such numbers.¹⁵⁶ The publicity that he garnered, moreover, distracted from the efforts of not only Mr. Cherry’s Council but also of HAG. Andrea Cousins remembered that local organizations and the NSM’s central office often tried to figure out how “grassroots community government” could connect to other statewide or national projects. “Someone would come from the outside and then

¹⁵² Minutes of NSM Congress, December 17, 1963, NSM Papers, Box 1, Folder 2.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Lipsky, 79-80.

leave.”¹⁵⁷ Gray could be considered a “King figure,” the mobilizer, who led the movement and received all the credit for the local work. This had the potential to occlude the work of local peoples.¹⁵⁸

Through the early spring of 1964, the NSM Congress debated whether the NSM should formally expand into other northern cities. Newark was an option but quickly put on hold because Strickland believed “programs qua programs are meaningless.” The numerous city projects that included a multitude of other projects did not foster enough sharing. “We haven’t learned anything from all our experiments.” Strickland desired a purview that focused on tactics that the NSM could work on instead of “try out.”¹⁵⁹ The organization tradition learned in Harlem was one of those that had worked. Hence, by 1964, the NSM’s attention would entirely shift to building a “ghetto-based movement.”

In the interim, the southern movement leaders called upon the NSM, as they did with other civil rights organizations, to recruit volunteers for the Mississippi Summer Project. In particular, SNCC desired to have white students from middle-class white background to bring awareness to the level of intimidation of and violence black Mississippians faced on a daily basis. Strickland decided to participate in the Mississippi Summer Project to help SNCC in its efforts to register black voters and support the local black leadership.

“Black political activity,” writers John Dittmer, “was carried on in the late spring of 1964 in an atmosphere of escalating white violence.”¹⁶⁰ Such violence lasted into the summer, both in

¹⁵⁷ Andrea Cousins, interview with author, January 31, 2014.

¹⁵⁸ See Charles Payne’s *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom*, 32-35 and Clayborne Carson’s *In Struggle* 61-63 to understand SNCC’s hesitance to involve and work with more national civil rights organizations like SCLC in the grassroots movement.

¹⁵⁹ Minutes of NSM Congress, December 17, 1963, NSM Papers, Box 1, Folder 2.

¹⁶⁰ John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 237.

the North and in the South. Shortly after volunteers arrived from around the country in June 1964, three civil rights workers: James Chaney, a black Mississippian, Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman, white CORE workers, were reported missing after they did not return from Philadelphia, Mississippi to investigate the burning of a church. Two months later, their bodies were found in a dam. It was this kind of violent repression that Strickland witnessed while registering voters in Mississippi.

The failure of the MFDP delegates to unseat the all-white Mississippi delegation in Atlantic City in August served as painful for many who had spent a year organizing. For Strickland, the MFDP was the “first emergence of a new politics in America---a politics of idealism and truth” whereby local, unknown people were taken charge of their destiny. A month before the MFDP he wrote in the NSM’s journal, *Freedom North*: “We in the Northern Student Movement support the Mississippi Challenge because it has taken on the institutional equities and the institutional deprivations which tie Mississippi and Harlem together in history and blood.”¹⁶¹ However, the failure of the white liberal institution and the federal government to stand up to segregation was indicative of blacks’ inability to maneuver the power structure by depending on white support. Historian William Chafe has described this as the “progressive mystique,” or the appearance of progressivism that is marked by civilities yet maintains the status quo.¹⁶²

Returning to Harlem, Strickland charged into reform and continued to speak about his frustration with the movement. The riots of 1964 across Harlem and other northern cities were

¹⁶¹ William Strickland, *Freedom North*, vol 1. no 6. Box 3, Folder 4.

¹⁶² William Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

brewing as early as 1961.¹⁶³ Strickland viewed them less as riots than as political rebellions. Using the label “riots”, Strickland thought, described unorganized, spontaneous activity. Conceptualizing the riots as rebellions, Strickland asserted, challenged America’s claims to being a democratic power. “If rebellions were legitimate, then America becomes legitimate,” Strickland believed.¹⁶⁴

With regards to the civil rights agenda, Strickland viewed the protest activity that rocked Harlem, Philadelphia, Chicago, and other northern cities, confirmed that the focus on integration was ineffective for black northerners. “Protest qua protest has dialed to effect substantive change in the country,” Strickland wrote in August 1964. The civil rights movement was only “playing at freedom” as “the masses of the ghetto...[felt]...that they [had] no vehicle for the effective articulation of their needs and demands.” The movement had taken the wrong direction, Strickland believed, because the civil rights organization’s agenda emphasized non-violence and focused more on “becoming a respectable pressure group than on the need to amass a stable center of power.” “The Movement,” he wrote, “had no ideology or theory or change, no political, or economic program and no real perspective on the dynamics of the changing American society.”¹⁶⁵

Interracial organizing became a focal point on which to critique the efficacy of the movement. The HEP and HAG projects were highly integrated but for Strickland, the activities of the HEP proved problematic to the goals of the larger freedom struggle. On his visits to HEP, he recalled his astonishment at white female organizers and black male Harlem residents singing “Wobbly Songs” and drinking wine in the basement of the HEP’s office. For Strickland, such

¹⁶³ Major newspapers like the *NY Times* followed stories of “brief” riots and spontaneous community protest beginning in 1961.

¹⁶⁴ William Strickland, interview with author, January 30, 2014.

¹⁶⁵ William Strickland, *Freedom North* vol. 1 no. 1, SCM Papers, Box 23, Folder 423.

interactions between white female organizers and young black Harlemites perpetuated a romanticized notion of what the movement was fighting for. Many organizers were white and middle-class while the residents tended to be poor, blacks; as Strickland saw it, they came from different worlds.¹⁶⁶

What frustrated Strickland more were the visits of HEP staffers and black male Harlem residents made to the upscale villa of the wealthy Peter Bittenweiser for cocktail parties and hanging out spots. Bittenweiser was a wealthy Dartmouth graduate at the time. The disconnect between the realities of Bittenweiser and the Harlem youth was a “Grand Canyon gap between the lives—and futures—of his uptown visitors and his life and influence as a member of the American ruling class.” These were “unattainable fantasies” to Strickland that influenced the politics of those who should have been involved in a struggle more meaningful. To Strickland’s thinking, “these were the kinds of experiences that fundamentally sabotaged the kind of black perspective needed to wage the real black struggle in this country.”¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ William Strickland, E-mail correspondence with author, February 4, 2014.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

Harlem, Williams Institutional C.M.E. Church, December 20, 1964.
Malcolm, on stage with Mrs. Hamer and William Strickland of the
Committee in Support of the MPDP Challenge.



Malcolm X at podium while William Strickland and Fannie Lou
Hamer listen. *Malcolm X: Make It Plain*

In August 1964, Strickland issued a decree which he referred to as “no white women in the ghetto.” Along with the growing political violence in Harlem, Strickland believed it was the right and necessary move to engage in a black political struggle. While male project directors and staff remained on site.

The NSM closed out the year with a new public perception. The *New York Amsterdam News* named Strickland among the “city’s more militant civil rights officials” including Malcolm X and Jesse Gray. On December 19th, the NSM hosted an all-day conference titled “The Black Political Revolution-A Struggle to Political Power,” at the Morris Presbyterian Church.¹⁶⁸ Strickland had invited his longtime friend to serve as the rally’s keynote speaker. Using his

¹⁶⁸ “Militants Set Rally,” *New York Amsterdam News*, December 19, 1964.

position as the chair of the AdHoc New York Community for the MFDP, Strickland also invited Fannie Lou Hamer, SNCC leader and Vice Chair of the MFDP. Just months earlier, Malcolm X formed the all-black Organization of African American Unity (OAAU) for the “Afro-American to restore communications with Africa.” The new organization, Malcolm X hoped, would strive towards one goal: “freedom of oppression” by controlling the politics and politicians, voter registration, among other initiatives. Hamer, on the other hand, built an expertise as a local leader and experienced the difficulties of voter registration in the South. When offered the compromise by the MFDP, she said, “We didn't come all this way for no two seats when all of us is tired. Now I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired.” The rally was symbolic. Strickland remembered, he was “intrigued with the possibility of unity.”¹⁶⁹ “You could bring the black North and the black South together in an independent political perspective.” The rally symbolized a new alliance among blacks to form collective political action away from the civil rights alliance.

Conclusion

The NSM's shift from tutorial projects to community action changed its agenda towards the direction of independent black political organization. The tutorial projects exposed the magnitude and entrenchment of American racism. Learning from lessons of failed civil rights liberalism and capitalizing on the black community organizing tradition, the NSM worked to facilitate change. Focused on the efficacy of ordinary, individual leadership supported by a community base, the rent strikes program succeeded largely because local people, not the NSM

¹⁶⁹ Strickland, interview with author, January 31, 2014.

staff were involved. These campaigns made gains and introduced a renewed civil rights tactic which became a model for other city projects.

The year 1964 saw a change of the NSM's identification as an interracial movement grounded in a community nationalist tradition. With the establishment of the Freedom Library in Philadelphia, the organization's search for a cultural identity in black organizing took precedence while the Black People's Unity Movement stressed independence away from white majority coalitions. Black Power was not invented by SNCC activist Stokely Carmichael, although he may have popularized the term. Rather, it was an ideology and practice derived from experiences in the North and South. Through successes and failures, Strickland became convinced that freedom could not solely be achieved through educational projects; freedom required the dismissal of the contradictions of white involvement and black autonomy and direct conflict between black built institutions and the power structure.

Chapter 3: “The Advocates of the “New Politics” Have Arrived”: Reform, Conflict, and Decline in the NSM, 1964-1967

“The perception of change is a phantom sense in one’s consciousness. Sometime one event will clarify this vague feeling and make the world into a different thing than it was before. At least that’s how I came to understand that one phase of the movement was passing into history.”

-William “Bill” Strickland
Editorial, “*Freedom and the New Fascism*,” 1964¹⁷⁰

By the end of 1964, a crisis in black and white confronted civil rights forces. Activists marked significant achievements that year. Congress passed the 1964 Civil Rights Act and President Johnson launched his ambitious “War on Poverty.” In the midst of these achievements, other protests and organizing activities provided what social movement historian Clayborne Carson has called the “crucial test of the prevailing postwar civil rights strategy.”¹⁷¹ Projects like the Mississippi Freedom Summer used protest in the form of voter registration and demonstrations to expose the tenacious structures of white supremacy that held on despite federal initiatives. This strategy, and the movement itself, relied on a multiracial coalition working in communities to build participatory democracy among ordinary people. For those who worked behind the scenes of the movement, the failure of democracy in Atlantic City and the rejection of the MFDP by the white liberals who controlled the Democratic Party signaled the limits of that strategy and of the power African Americans could develop through coalition

¹⁷⁰ William Strickland, “Freedom and the New Fascism,” *Freedom North*, vol. 1, no.1, 1964, SCM Papers, Box, 23, Folder 423.

¹⁷¹ Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 144.

protest. Therefore, in early 1965, black leaders decided that the interracial, integrationist agenda of the movement was passing into history. The successes and failures of 1964 had “made the world into a different thing than it was before.”¹⁷²

For Strickland, the shift in his consciousness and NSM leadership stemmed from the 1964 riots. “The riots,” he wrote, were a “symbol of change.” Strickland considered them less riots than political rebellions that rejected the repeated failures of pseudo-democratic institutions. The rebellions confirmed to him that the movement, “led by an interracial middle class and seeking integration and personal integration”, did not serve or represent black northerners. “The impoverished were both leaderless and abandoned...and the movement “[had] waged its war in a battlefield unrelated to the needs of the indigent, the hungry, and the jobless,” he wrote. The movement had left out those “others” who, “by one desperate and futile act [had brought] themselves to the attention of America.” The new movement that would emerge, Strickland and NSM project leaders believed, was one that “confronted the structural barriers to equality and enables people to assume responsibility for their own lives.”¹⁷³

In a letter to Jack Minnis of SNCC, Strickland described his own perception of the need for black independence and the success of the black freedom struggles. To establish a “proper” orientation that would allow blacks to challenge the power structure without compromising their agenda, Strickland believed they had to form a political base of their own. “What we are talking about is black government in black communities to deal with black people’s problems of police, housing schools, etc. and to act as a representative of black interests in relations with the white

¹⁷² William Strickland, “Freedom and the New Fascism,” *Freedom North*, vol. 1, issue 1. SCM Papers, Box 23, Folder 423.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

power structure.”¹⁷⁴ In many ways, Strickland’s words foreshadowed Stokely Carmichael’s explanation of black independent political organization in his 1967 book, *Black Power*. “It is absolutely imperative that black people strive to form an independent base of political power *first*...Black people must set about to build those new forms of politics,” Carmichael wrote.¹⁷⁵ He described it as the genesis of the Lowndes County Freedom Organization in which local blacks from Lowndes County, Alabama created their own political party. Voter repression was commonplace in Lowndes Country even after the passage of the Voting Rights Act.¹⁷⁶ Strickland’s decision to build a new movement outside of the interracial tradition was also the genesis of the NSM’s new politics, one that gave black leaders within the NSM a space to develop the black power tradition with a black working class that did not participate in the prior national or local movements. This new politics heightened tensions within the organization itself.

The only way Strickland envisioned the new program of black political organization working with the interracial tradition was if “serious whites [were] committed to the overthrow of the system.”¹⁷⁷ His “no white girls in the ghetto” memo in the prior year already indicated that he did not consider all of the white members in the NSM serious about the old agenda, nor did he anticipate gaining their full support. “Given the nature of things, I expect the number of serious whites to be a decided minority,” Strickland wrote.”¹⁷⁸ The definition of “serious” in the context of commitment and struggle was contested among black and white NSM members;

¹⁷⁴ Letter to Jack Minnis from William Strickland, November 3, 1965, NSM Papers, Box 17, Folder 2.

¹⁷⁵ Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (New York: Random House, 1967), 96.

¹⁷⁶ Hasan Jeffries, *Bloody Lowndes: Civil Rights and Black Power in Alabama’s Black Belt*. New York: New York University Press, 2009.

¹⁷⁷ Letter to Jack Minnis from William Strickland, November 3, 1965, NSM Papers, Box 17, Folder 2.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

consequently, some saw black power as a complete rejection of a multi-racial, multi-class coalition to achieve grassroots democracy.

This chapter explores the emergence of black power politics in the NSM as a consequence of its leaders' desire to break away from the liberal civil rights alliance and transition into a struggle controlled by blacks across class and ideological divisions. Reform eventually led to internal racial tensions but an even stronger commitment by the NSM's black leaders to building a movement on black collective action and political empowerment. The NSM's influence on student radicalism during the late 1960s did not wane because of its transition into an all-black organization. Rather, continued state repression of civil rights activity, the shifting priorities of the movement, and the passing of time eventually dimmed the NSM's organizational energy and influence in local political struggles.

“A Library Grows Out of the Riot Rubble”

The return to Philadelphia to start a new city project signaled the arrival of a “new politics” in the NSM. Just two years earlier, the NSM had launched the Philadelphia Tutorial Project (PTP) with an interracial base of black and white college students who tutored black high school students in North Philadelphia's neighborhoods. Two years later, John Elliott Churchville and a team of all-black volunteers were ready to open a storefront on 2064 Ridge Avenue not to sell groceries but to begin the Freedom Library Project. Operating in a black, low-income, working class community with all black staff and leadership, the project was the first of its kind in the NSM. Unlike other city projects, where interracial staff supported community action groups led by black peoples, the Freedom Library Project was the building block of a black power base within the NSM.

Churchville's recruitment to the NSM in early 1964 coincided perfectly with the NSM's new direction of working in poor black communities. Churchville and Strickland met in New York where Strickland had shared his frustrations with the progress and direction of the movement. In particular, Strickland discussed his observations of interracial relationships and what he perceived to be a lack of interest in a "real movement." "We have to do something about this man," Churchville told Strickland while walking down an avenue in Harlem. They quickly sat down to plan a proposal.¹⁷⁹

Churchville, a North Philadelphia native, attended Temple University for a short time before moving to New York at the age of 19. He found Harlem a black nationalist's utopia. In Harlem, Churchville spent time perusing the books in Lewis Michaux's African National Memorial Bookstore. "All of the black nationalists were out there," Churchville remembered including his role model Malcolm X. He remembered Malcolm X as a "strong guy but very humble" person. After one service at the Nation of Islam's mosque, Churchville surprised himself by approach the minister and saying, "Tell me about yourself." Malcolm X replied, "I am irrelevant. What matters is our people. My job is to get your head screwed on right and [to do the same] for other people." Malcolm X's humility, charisma, and dedication to the black freedom struggle made the Black Muslim Movement more attractive to Churchville. He continued to attend the "rapping" sessions on the corner of 125th Street and Lenox Avenue and began going to services at the Nation's Mosque.¹⁸⁰

In Harlem, Churchville already began to develop his own perspective in interracial coalition building. He self-identified as a "Malcolm-Maoist", an identity that reconciled the

¹⁷⁹ John Elliott Churchville, interview with author, January 27, 2014.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

ideologies of Malcolm X and those of Mao Zedung, the Chinese revolutionary leader. Black nationalism established that the plight of blacks was based on “race and racial oppression” while the perspective of Third World revolutionaries’ added an anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist stance.¹⁸¹ Churchville believed “Malcolm-Maoism” brought together a “shared target” of struggle against the United States’ domestic social structure and imperialist actions abroad.¹⁸² Attending meetings on Lenox Avenue with Marxists and Communists provided him cautionary optimism for coalition work. “I was so black and they were so white that it just didn’t work out,” he remembered. For Churchville, this gap could not be bridged because the “European response” did not allow for a variety of perspectives from other races, especially people of African descent. What seemed to be a shared unity of struggle was a “falsehood of universalism” in Churchville’s opinion. He became wary of coalition work between whites and blacks because the racial hierarchy would impose itself and whites would feel “responsible to educate [blacks].”¹⁸³ Instead, Churchville identified with a central tenet of black nationalism that “firm unity must be built within the black community before alliances with others.”¹⁸⁴

Integration, then, was a point of concern for Churchville. “I didn’t buy integration because I thought that integration was saying what whites have is so great [and] we want a part of that.” However, he did not see himself as a separatist. Rather, he was a nationalist with a firm belief and confidence in the possibilities of black autonomy and self-determination. Churchville found those possibilities in the work of SNCC and NSM. He attended the NSM’s 1962 Intercollegiate Conference at Sarah Lawrence and the conference made him “very proud to be black.” The black

¹⁸¹ Chao Ren, “Concrete Analysis of Concrete Conditions”: A Study of the Relationship between the Black Panther Party and Maoism,” *Constructing the Past*, 10, no. 1: (2009), 31.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Churchville, interview with author, January 27, 2014.

¹⁸⁴ Michael C. Dawson, *Black Visions: The Roots of Contemporary African-American Political Ideologies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 88.

SNCC leaders who visited there inspired him because he saw they were leading their own organization. In addition, the keynote speaker, Reverend Dr. Leon Sullivan, his former pastor and leader in Philadelphia's selective patronage movement, once labeled him as "one of the finest young men in America." When he was asked to drive a donated bus to SNCC's Atlanta office, Churchville decided right away. Without a driver's license, he left his job as a janitor, his gig as a part-time musician, and his five non-paying roommates for the South.¹⁸⁵

In 1962, SNCC leadership believed "[they] could only "strike at the root of segregation if blacks and whites worked together."¹⁸⁶ Despite his reservations about integration, Churchville saw SNCC as an avenue to address southern white supremacy. "If you're persecuted, then I'm on your side," he figured. Yet, he could not help but disagree with SNCC mentors like Charles Sherrod and Courtney Cox who initially supported integration. He saw voting power, not integration, as the important issue because registering black people to vote could upend Jim Crow norms while giving him a sense of the power of a particular community. This was dangerous work, but it was those who risked their lives for freedom that appealed to Churchville. "My problem with other black nationalists was that everyone was talking that black talk but they were not willing to go South."¹⁸⁷

Registering voters in Albany, Georgia convinced Churchville that interracial organizing could damage the freedom struggle.¹⁸⁸ In the spring of 1963, Charles Sherrod sent an interracial team of eleven staff members to register voters. If a black and white partner could work together, side by side, then it would defeat the idea that black and whites were not equal.¹⁸⁹ Sherrod

¹⁸⁵ Churchville, interview with author, January 27, 2014.

¹⁸⁶ Carson, 75.

¹⁸⁷ Churchville, interview with author, January 27, 2014.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ See Carson, 75-77.

assigned Churchville a white partner to register local blacks. Although Clayborne Carson has argue that “black field secretaries apparently accepted their white counterparts, as did many black residents who opened their homes,” that was not the case for Churchville.¹⁹⁰ When black residents opened their doors, Churchville felt that they seemed to accept the white partner more. “It really irked me,” Churchville recalled, and made him feel invisible.¹⁹¹

Convinced that the pairing of white and black partners spoke more to an agenda of integration rather than voting rights, he returned to Sherrod with a proposal. Churchville asked Sherrod to place him with a black partner. If they did not register as many voters, then he would team up with a white partner again. After working with a black field secretary, Churchville nabbed more voters. “We were able to get more black people to register because I used black rap. I talked about voter registration as developing black power-the power to control and the power to eventually have your own candidates.”¹⁹² Churchville’s approach and later success made interracial organizing as a strategy less compelling to Churchville and other SNCC workers who saw that white students had the potential to “detract” from “efforts to develop local black leadership.”¹⁹³

After the March on Washington in 1963, Churchville left SNCC and returned to Atlanta to join the Nation of Islam. Rising through the ranks because of his community organizing skills, he became Minister Jeremiah X’s secretary and received an assignment to teach organizing and literacy skills to mosque members. Growing divisions among the ranks of the Nation of Islam put a halt to his quick ascent. Although he was promised a secretary position at a Philadelphia

¹⁹⁰ Carson, 77.

¹⁹¹ Churchville, interview with author, January 27, 2014.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Carson, 77.

mosque, he found out that the head of the Nation, Elijah Muhammad, had reserved the position for someone else. Rather than continue in the Nation, he took up a new gig with the NSM.¹⁹⁴

In the summer of 1964, not long before the Philadelphia Race Riot began, the Freedom Library opened its doors. Churchville had multiple goals for the Freedom Library Project, but the main one was to combat “black-self-hatred and lack of identity” while “[stimulating] Negro pride in self and in the community.”¹⁹⁵ Conducting a host of “street conversations and random interviews”, Churchville and his early staff found that the “pulse of the community” was beating irregularly”; “hardly any of those interviewed had healthy conceptions of themselves.”¹⁹⁶ When he asked interviewees their opinions on what the greatest contribution blacks had made to the world, Churchville was taken aback by the most popular response. Many of the interviewees, Churchville noted in the Freedom Library prospectus, knew little besides that blacks had built the American nation through their enslaved labor. After looking through scientific studies to find a program that could instill racial pride and reverse the “damaging psychological effect” of white racism, Churchville opted for a two-pronged approach. The first goal would include making blacks, especially children, aware of the “history of the Negro race” and the second was having them engage in constructive activities. “The hope,” he wrote, “is that ultimately the Freedom Library can lead, via young people, to a grassroots community organization.”¹⁹⁷

The Freedom Library operated at an ambitious and hectic pace. The library itself contained over 2,000 donated books written by and about black people. At the same time residents entered the storefront and perused books on the shelves, a pre-school program with

¹⁹⁴ Churchville, interview with author, January 27, 2014.

¹⁹⁵ *Freedom North*, vol. 1 no. 4 and no.5, NSM Papers, Box 3, Folder 3.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.



John Churchville and his students at the Freedom Library, *Black History: Lost, Stolen, or Strayed* (1968).

over 40 students, from ages 2 ½ to 4, met four times a week for two hours.¹⁹⁸ The program sought to “equip children for learning” with a host of reading skills and disciplinary lessons. A “black preparation” program provided students with the “emotional armor” for the racism that they most likely were to confront.¹⁹⁹ Their primers read, “I am an Afro-American. My homeland is Africa. Africa is a Continent...Africans are black people. Black people are beautiful. I am beautiful.”²⁰⁰ An after-school program was designed to “aid youngsters 6-13 years old...stressing history and reading.” Reading was important to Churchville because he believed once students grasped reading, they could learn on their own. “If you can read and understand, you can even

¹⁹⁸ “Children Begin In This School at 2 ½-Years-Old.” *Philadelphia Tribune*, September 3, 1966. pg.6.

¹⁹⁹ *Black History: Lost, Stolen, or Strayed*, DVD, (CBS, 1968).

²⁰⁰ “Children Begin In This School at 2 ½-Years-Old.” *Philadelphia Tribune*, September 3, 1966. pg.6.

teach yourself math.”²⁰¹ His experience in the first year was frustrating. “Kids were coming in with 4th grade homework and they were reading at a kindergarten level,” he lamented, adding, “We gotta stop this crap!”²⁰²

Through the Freedom Library, Churchville and the NSM invested in neighborhood children. When the program began, Churchville recruited black university students at universities like Temple University but then decided to use high school students to tutor younger students in elementary and junior high school. Although some tutors were behind in their classes, they could “bring a connection to the kids” while developing a sense of responsibility for the future of the community.²⁰³ Many of these older tutors were “corner boys”---young black males who often got into trouble because of gang activity. They discussed with Churchville ways to prevent juvenile delinquency and problems like gang conflicts.²⁰⁴ Churchville had a talent for connecting and often gathered children thirty minutes in advance of the programming sessions. “Watching him come down the street, a flock of children at his heels, one is reminded of the mythical pied piper without his pipes,” one staff member wrote in the Freedom Library Newsletter.²⁰⁵

As with much of the NSM’s programming, the Freedom Library strove to encourage black indigenous leadership. Early on, a Freedom Corps was established to ensure that the activities of the Freedom Library could be “developed and carried out by community people.” Recognizing poor housing as a local concern, Churchville and staff encouraged residents to organize people who were frustrated about dilapidated buildings. In turn, staff contacted city

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Churchville, interview with author, January 27, 2014.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Churchville, interview with author, January 27, 2014 and “Children Begin In This School at 2 ½-Years-Old.” *Philadelphia Tribune*, September 3, 1966. pg.6.

²⁰⁵ *Freedom North*, vol. 1 no. 4 and no. 5, NSM Papers, Box 3, Folder 3.

agencies to report complaints. Churchville viewed rent strikes as an avenue beyond community protest. “Our motive is not just to get them shook up so they’ll run around with signs, but to let them see we’re together...If we help them, they can help us.” With community support, the Freedom Library staff, desired to go a step further to help residents lessen their reliance on landlords and merchants who had “notorious reputations for overcharging and very bad policies.” Churchville also saw an opportunity to gain economic freedom and employment. Buying and repairing run down houses and investing such funds in the neighborhood could stimulate income while local people could be trained as business leaders and own local stores.²⁰⁶

The emphasis on the mobilization and organization of black local people into cultural and political powerhouses was the distinguishing feature of the Freedom Library Project. Every Wednesday night, for example, the Freedom Library hosted a “Black History Night” at a local bar. The bar transformed into a classroom and community people would leave their bar stools to teach each other history. “Have you read this? Have you read Dubois?” were some of the recurring questions, Churchville recalled, before they began with their own lessons. Churchville encouraged people to join by asking “Would you like to teach us tonight?” As the weeks went on, the sessions became more popular attracting more than 150 attendees. The bar sessions gave Churchville a chance to do some “real community organizing” because it brought him into contact with local neighborhood activists and also those who would normally be considered “low lives” because of their growing bar tabs. Churchville also gained further perspective on the alienation a lack of opportunity caused. “No one gives you an opportunity to use [your education] so you do a cheers thing where nobody knows your name. This is where

²⁰⁶ *Freedom North*, vol. 4 and 5, NSM Papers, Box 3, Folder 3.



Freedom Library storefront, *Black History: Lost, Stolen, or Strayed* (1968).

everybody knows your name and you have conversation with people who are catching hell like you are.”²⁰⁷

The Freedom Library Project garnered high praise from local community members as well as NSM staff. Shortly after the riots, the *Philadelphia Bulletin* wrote a news story entitled, “A Library Grows Out of the Riot Rubble.”²⁰⁸ The *Bulletin* did not hide its surprise that the storefront, located just a few blocks from where the riots took place, remained untouched, “an empty storefront...in the midst of the area bashed by rioters.” They observed, “Broken windows near it are covered with plywood and policemen lounge in small groups down near the block. On the window of the store are neat gold decal letters which say “NSM Freedom Library.” A reminder of the Freedom Library’s renewed commitment to struggle, the building became a symbol of pride and resilience in the community. Indeed, those who protested in the streets of

²⁰⁷ Churchville, interview with author, January 27, 2014.

²⁰⁸ “A Library Grows Out of the Riot Rubble.” *The Philadelphia Bulletin*, February 16, 1964.

North Philadelphia not only respected the movement galvanized by Churchville and his staff, they easily might have been active participants in the library's programming. The Freedom Library and the urban protests shared the same membership: poor and only partially franchised black folks.

Churchville believed that the success of the Freedom Library stemmed from the intra-racial nature of its organizing. The local, black Philadelphian staff worked with other local, black Philadelphians to fulfill the community's "political and productive potential."²⁰⁹ Other NSM projects, engaged in community action, but maintained an interracial staff. The interracial Philadelphia Tutorial Project was "powerful in its own way," Churchville remembered, but he saw it rooted in a vision of benevolence fundamentally different from the "self-help and self-determination model" the Freedom Library espoused.²¹⁰ The point of keeping the Freedom Library all-black was not to be separatist but rather to nurture black autonomy before seeking to build coalitions. "We own our own stuff," Churchville explained, "so when folks get sick of us they can't tell us get out."²¹¹ If black people, organizers and ordinary people alike, could work together on their own terms without the "welfare mentality of dependency on whites, then local leaders could believe in the "efficacy of their own leadership."²¹²

Churchville's vision met resistance within the NSM. When a white liberal member approached him to integrate the project, Churchville refused. "I did not want a white person coming there," he recalled.²¹³ Using what Churchville described as "nefarious ways", the white NSM member, tried to convince Churchville that an integrated project at the Freedom Library

²⁰⁹ *Freedom North*, vol. 1 no. 4 and no.5, NSM Papers, Box 3, Folder 3.

²¹⁰ Churchville, interview with author, January 27, 2014.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid.

would fit perfectly with the NSM's mold. Churchville, however, viewed this as an attempt to control the black independent model of the organization and "achieve a kumbaya" of blacks and whites working together.²¹⁴

After several conversations revisiting the matter, the white member remained confused by Churchville's refusal to allow white volunteers into the Freedom Library Project. "I'm a good white person. What's the problem?" was the question Churchville perceived to come out of their conversations.²¹⁵ Churchville continued to emphasize that the issue was not personal but one of autonomy for the black community. The more the two conversed, the more Churchville became frustrated. The white member displayed what black sociologist and educator, Kenneth Clark, had once dubbed the "delusions of the white liberal."²¹⁶ As Clark noted about white liberals in general, "The crowning insult which anyone can pay to an intelligent Northern white is to suggest that he might be motivated by some action, decision, or plan by racial confidence." Churchville saw this play out in the disagreement over the Freedom Library; he believed that the continuous requests to integrate the library were coming from a source of white paternalism that the member could not acknowledge. The conflict made Churchville wary of the designation "liberal" and even more willing to embrace the label of "nationalist."²¹⁷

The Freedom Library Project was now a model for what a black model of organization in the NSM could look like. By the end of 1964, Strickland completed his first year in office and acquired a black nationalist political resume. Under his leadership, the NSM heightened its focus on community organization and launched the first non-interracial staff project. Strickland did not

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Churchville, interview with author, January 27, 2014.

²¹⁶ Kenneth Clark, "Delusions of the White Liberal," *New York Times Magazine*, n.d., pg. 27 and 135-136. Catherine Clarke Civil Rights Collection, Box 4, Folder 9.

²¹⁷ Churchville, interview with author, January 27, 2014.

see this as a sea change.²¹⁸ Others like Charyn Sutton, a black volunteer and later staff member in the New York headquarters, saw a more significant shift. They believed that such a decision was a “conscious decision to move [from its interracial roots] to a black organization.”²¹⁹

The NSM did make a conscious decision to place community organizing at the center of its commitment to a “movement of the ghetto.” In a 1965 *Freedom North* editorial, Strickland declared that “progress’ must include people.” In other words, “the poor must become involved in this process of change. It is they who are oppressed and must end their oppression.” No longer was Strickland simply a theorist; he had transformed into an organizer. As such, he and the NSM, “must help by encouraging the development of political forms through which the poor can challenge and change those institutions which now so limit their lives.”²²⁰

In New York, housing again became a key issue. Early in 1965, Mr. Granville Cherry, the tenant organizer who made his way onto the front page of the *NY Times* in 1963, sat outside city hall. The same problem had returned despite the progress made two years before. Now, Cherry and tenants were “without heat, hot water, and electricity for at least seventy-two hours.” On the morning of January 21st, Cherry, his wife, and his fellow tenants picketed City Hall for its “lack of action on humane conditions.” The next day, Strickland and a mixed group of local Harlem leaders and NSM staff arrived to support “New York’s first tenant sit-in at the Mayor’s office.” Upon requesting to meet with the mayor, the group was told he would not be in until 3 pm. The group remained and while the mayor ignored them on his way in, he sent his aide to order a

²¹⁸ William Strickland, interview with author, January 30, 2014.

²¹⁹ Quoted in Matthew Countryman’s *Up South*, 189.

²²⁰ *Freedom North*, vol 1. no. 1, SCM Papers, Box 31, Folder 423.

proposal that included an investigation, a meeting, and repairs after the investigation. Sensing it was the usual “run around”, the group waited and eventually met with a city official. On Monday, they followed up with a demonstration with the city’s housing concern groups. Quickly, the city sent emergency crews to repair the buildings and Mr. Cherry’s and all of East Harlem received hot water and heat while a telephone number was given to report emergencies. Such protests introduced residents to the institutional barriers beyond their exploitative landlords and poor living conditions.²²¹

Protesting tenants were now able to connect their understanding of the institutional politics at City Hall to their on the ground political activity. Furthermore, they gained directly the rewards of their protest rather than going through other civil rights forces. “A number of victories...were brought by “grassroots people; not the established Civil Rights groups,” a writer of *The Organizer* observed. These strategies involved local, black indigenous leadership with the NSM in the background brought a confluence of a poor people’s movement supported by the black nationalist tradition.²²²

Local people, on their own, had to understand the root of politics, whether in City Hall or the state government, in order to build a foundation for a larger moment. Several NSM projects reported that they were doing so. In Detroit, the Adult Community Movement for Equality (ACME) set up a “[vigorous] picket line outside of a local park to protest “the complete lack of see-saws, slides, swings...for children.”²²³ The North End Community Action Project (NECAP) in Hartford held meetings with welfare mothers to organize a group, led by a spokesperson, to speak at legislative hearings on the welfare budget. NECAP organizers decided that “there was a

²²¹ *The Organizer*, January 28, 1965. NSM Papers, Box 1, Folder 2.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid.

necessity for open conflict between the city and NECAP” because black Hartford did not have effective political power in the city.²²⁴ For Strickland, conflict was a reasonable organizing tool. “Change,” he believed, “[came] only through conflict between those who have power and those who don’t.”²²⁵ This was the style of community organization the NSM continued to espouse and it would come under the guise of black power.

The NSM was not the only part of the movement evolving in the mid-1960s, nor were debates over organizing strategies the only crises. In 1964, Malcolm X departed the Nation of Islam—a move that as geographer James Tyner has written was crucial for Malcolm X’s own maturation as an advocate of social justice.²²⁶ With his new organization, the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU), Malcolm X called for a broad scale coalition among blacks to vote and register and took part in an NSM-arranged discussion with SNCC stalwart Fannie Lou Hamer. He sought to build alliances between black Americans and Africans and was planning to use the United Nations to globalize the black freedom struggle and “make the world see that our problem was no longer a Negro problem, or an American problem, but a human problem.”²²⁷ He was murdered in February 1965 before he could mount his full program. Strickland believed that Malcolm X was assassinated to prevent the elevated political struggle and consciousness he would have presented to the American public.

²²⁴ *The Organizer*, January 28, 1965. NSM Papers, Box 1, Folder 2.

²²⁵ *The Times-Picayune*, October 7, 1965.

²²⁶ James Tyner, *The Geography of Malcolm X: Black Radicalism and the Remaking of American Space* (New York: Taylor and Francis Group, 2006)

²²⁷ Malcolm X, “Not Just An American Problem, But A World Problem” February 18, 1965 from February 1965 (New York, Pathfinder Books, 1992).

“Malcolm X died, basically, because he did not play the “rules of the game,” Strickland wrote in a raw and reflective epitaph. “He was killed because he represented more truth than this country is willing to face.” The murder “left a hole” in the movement “and at the time left the movement at a crossroads.”²²⁸ Malcolm X’s death was not only a public tragedy but, for Strickland who considered him a friend, mentor, and confidante, a personal one as well. The NSM Congress and the “entire organization” had gathered over the weekend in Nyack, New York for a “training and review institute” and “had just completed our last difficult session when the radio reported the assassination.” News of the killing gave the “previous three days meaning and direction,” wrote Peter Morrill, the editor of *Freedom North*.²²⁹

While the NSM evolved into a national civil rights organization, they did not forget their freedom fighters and comrades in the South. Strickland and the NSM continued to work from the New York headquarters with the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party after the challenge in Atlantic City. In March 1965, the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) asked Strickland to assist with the logistics and planning of the Selma to Montgomery March. On March 7th, the first march of a planned two weeks of events began with the intention to protest the exclusionary voting processes taking place in Alabama. Over 600 protestors crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge on what came to be known as “Bloody Sunday,” only to be met by state and local police who beat protestors with billy clubs and set off canisters of tear gas. A march was then planned to the state’s capitol.²³⁰

²²⁸ William Strickland, Epitaph for Malcolm, *Freedom North*, vol. 1. no. 3, NSM Papers, Box 3, Folder 2.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ NSM Press Release, NSM Papers, Box

Strickland responded quickly to COFO's request. In preparation for the bus trip, Strickland contacted the White House, far removed from the situation, to protect its citizens. His telegram requested that President Johnson "exercise his Constitutional authority to protect all peaceful demonstrators in Alabama."²³¹ State authorities disregarded the newly implemented Civil Rights Act with the "continued use of horses, whips, and cattle prods in Montgomery." This observation reinforced his belief that the South remained tightly controlled by those who sought to maintain the status quo. Strickland and the students boarded a bus and travelled to "protest the treatment of fellow citizens in the Alabama's capitol and participate in the beginnings of a political voice for Negroes there."²³²

The two busloads of students who arrived in Montgomery comprised an interracial group. Half were black, half were white, and half were women and half were men. The students had boarded the bus in upstate New York and made their way "down South." Some were civil rights workers while others were "uninvolved community people."²³³ William Chafe was the median between those two categories. A 21-year old recent Harvard graduate and high school religion teacher, Chafe found himself "very involved in New York City politics." As a political organizer, he performed "street corner speaker" in Manhattan in support of Robert Kennedy's 1964 senatorial campaign. Despite his politically conservative family and religious domination, the American Baptist Church, Chafe identified with the progressive movement. He was "deeply religious and committed to the social gospel," believing that "Jesus was a powerful figure of change. More so, his impetus for travelling to Montgomery came from Dr. King's sermon, "St.

²³¹ NSM Press Release, NSM Papers.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ibid.



William Strickland (Left) and NSM volunteers de-board bus upon their arrival in Montgomery. “A Bridge to Freedom (1965),” *Eyes on the Prize*, 1987.

Paul’s Letter to American Christians” at his church. “He told us we weren’t doing well and we needed to get it together,” Chafe remembered.²³⁴

The five day trip to Montgomery provided insight into the shifting tide of the movement. Chafe, upon arrival into Montgomery, remembered the thick “sense of fear.” “There were blaring cars with Ku-Klux-Klan [members] trying to intimidate us.” Joining the safe haven of the beloved community, the volunteers slept in the basement of a local church and canvassed neighborhoods the next day to encourage local people to host and feed the marchers. “The sense in politics, atmosphere, among SNCC was clearly changing,” Chafe recalled. In particular, SNCC leaders resented Dr. King and viewed him as an outsider, referring him to as “De Lawd.”²³⁵ Distance and tension could be found in every debate about protest tactics, specifically

²³⁴ William Chafe, interview with author, December 9, 2013.

²³⁵ Chafe, interview with author, December 9, 2013.

nonviolent direct action and leadership in the movement. Not only were SNCC, SCLC and southern blacks at a crossroads but so too were the northern students.

The students' conversation on their return trip to the North exposed the transformative nature of race in America and the evolving relationship between blacks and whites. After receiving a "Thank You" speech from the overall-clad SNCC leader, James Forman, the students began their trip home. As the bus rolled out of Montgomery, their conversation turned to the violence and terror they witnessed in the city. Soon they engaged in a "dramatic, non-stop 24 hour conversation" in which they were "deeply serious in trying to come to grips with the differences race created between people." In a non-aggressive and non-confrontational manner, the students asked each other what their level of commitment to struggle would be in different scenarios. Chafe vividly recalled one scenario posed to the white students: "What happens if you get into a situation where blacks are on one side and whites were on one side [of a protest], can you cross that line?" The students reluctantly concluded that there were limitations to white activism and they had to "live with the conclusions of being white." Chafe connected the implications of the students' answer to the freedom struggle. "The notion that something cannot be overcome goes contrary to the idea of we shall overcome, black and white together. It is a recognition that at some point, no matter how much you want to, there is a level of things you cannot change."²³⁶ The conversation shattered their innocence regarding race relations. This reflected a divisive force with the NSM's own internal ranks.

The NSM's movement toward black power stemmed from its leadership's waning confidence that the interracial organizing tradition could achieve a full-fledged movement of the

²³⁶ Chafe, interview with author, December 9, 2013.

poor.²³⁷ The *Freedom North* journal, Strickland asserted in late 1965, would begin to explore the “experience of black people in America...not so much of the “New Left”, but of the “Third World.” *Freedom North*, as the NSM’s public voice, echoed the changing position within the organization. As “Third World” became a reference for discussing the black freedom struggle, they developed an explicit comparison of African-Americans to other black colonized peoples around the world. Furthermore, colonialism could be used as a reference to underline Strickland’s comparison of a white, paternalistic domination of blacks in the movement. In order for blacks to acquire political power and build “unity and self-determination,” Strickland believed, black leaders should break away from New Left organization. The NSM turned towards the growing, burgeoning black power movement.

In the past, the NSM addressed its shift towards black power. Now, in the late spring of 1965, the organization addressed its own racial conflict. Frank Joyce, the white project director of the Detroit NSM, in a critical essay, “Change in the Ranks”, discussed the evolution of the NSM from its inception. The tension between blacks and whites, he suggested, began as early as June 1963 at the NSM’s National Conference. “The New Haven conference, I think, contained all the seeds of the NSM’s development, although many things went unrecognized at the time,” Joyce wrote. One of those seeds was the growing division over strategy. At the New Haven conference, Stanley Aronowitz, a New Left writer and Stanley Winter, an urban developer, presented to the group on community organization ideology. In Joyce’s point of view, their presentations were ineffective. “Many people were unable to see the relevance of those guys, what they were talking about, and what they were doing.” Still, the issue went unresolved and

²³⁷ Clayborne Carson discusses this shift in SNCC, 191-211.

the Detroit project grew out of their meeting. “The whole issue of the relationship of blacks and whites in the NSM was submerged,” Joyce concluded.²³⁸

The founding of the Detroit Friends of the NSM in October 1965 confirmed that black-white tensions continued to exist as NSM shifted from an interracial to a black platform and membership. The Detroit Tutorial Project declined and Joyce directed the Adult Community Movement of Equality (ACME) that focused on community action oriented programs around housing, unemployment, and police brutality.²³⁹ Turning his attention to the role of whites in the movement, Joyce believed there were whites like himself who committed themselves to the movement and could now commit to NSM’s new platform of black power. The Friends of the NSM was described as a “newly formed organization of whites which seeks to work in the white community in ways which will complement and aid the struggle of black people for freedom.”²⁴⁰

Strickland, in a speech to the Friends of the NSM, emphasized that it was not his idea to establish the group but rather Joyce’s. “Frank’s position is that there are some sincere white people and that the only coalition that can be built is one based on truth. My position is to evaluate this attempt and to see what comes of it.”²⁴¹ Strickland’s optimism and desire to work within the liberal civil rights alliance was dim.

After the formation of the Detroit Friends of the NSM, the national organization’s next step towards building internal black leadership focused on discouraging whites from participating in the “ghetto-based movement.” In late 1965, the NSM released “An NSM

²³⁸ Frank Joyce, “Change in the Ranks,” *Freedom North* vol. 1 no. 4 and no.5, NSM Papers, Box 3, Folder 3.

²³⁹ *Freedom North* vol. 1 no. 4 and no.5, NSM Papers, Box 3, Folder 3.

²⁴⁰ *Freedom North*, vol. 1, no. 6, NSM Papers, Box 3, Folder 4.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

1. The American society is racist, North as well as South. The country was founded on the assumption on an assumption of white supremacy, and that assumption prevails to this day....	97
2. The objectives of the Civil Rights Movement, as implied by its title, have been incorrect...	
3. It is clear, that issues, such as housing, schools, police, welfare, and the like, are not the black problem. The black struggle can in fact be defined as an attempt to achieve dignity, identity, and manhood...	
4. Such a struggle implies the need for black power. In order to become men, black people must ultimately have the power to control the areas in which they live. The ghetto must cease to be a ghetto and become a community....	
5. If power is to be achieved, it can only be achieved through the maximum organization of <u>all</u> black people, the black masses as well as the black middle class. The Watts Riot proves that the people are ready to act on their behalf....	
6. The concept of community organization is invalid for a variety of reasons. Traditionally, community organizing has been oriented towards creating or increasing the participation of people in the decision making process in a given democratic area. The problem of black people, however, know no geographic bounds...Moreover, participation in the institution making process is not the same as eliminating racism and white supremacy from the institutions themselves. The community, then, must serve as a base for the beginning of a national movement to eliminate racism from American institutions.	
7. ...The proper role of whites and blacks in eliminating racism and building human society becomes clear. The role of blacks is to create a black power structure, because one does not presently exist. The role of whites, in addition to providing resources when requested, is to change the existing white power structures so as to allow the creation of a black power structure.	

Table 3. Partial of “An NSM Commentary,” *Freedom North*, vol. 1, no. 6, NSM Papers, Box 3, Folder 4.

Commentary”, referring to it as “a position statement of the entire staff.” The document listed seven brief statements followed by the rationale behind each one (Table 3). Most notable, was the seventh statement. Explicitly, the NSM’s leadership now took the position that racial separatism was necessary for the group to move forward in the black struggle. Groups like the Friends of the NSM could exist to support the movement, but outside of the community organizing tradition. Keeping with a central tenet of black power and black nationalism, Strickland believed that a black movement should be fortified before an interracial coalition could be approached. To the Friends of the NSM, he said, “What NSM is doing now...is [to] build a movement on our

experience, on the black reality...when that movement is formulated and cohesive, then those white people who are serious can be allies. But allies are not found in conversation; allies are found in struggle.”²⁴²

Using Strickland’s position, it is clear that the NSM’s shifting orientation to black leadership was more strategic than anti-white. White NSM staff members were encouraged to create and join new Friends of the NSM chapters to engage in white anti-racist organizing. Whereas, black SNCC staff used black power as a device to expel white SNCC staff, the NSM asked whites to be *allies* rather than *partners* in their next phase of the black freedom struggle. Charyn Sutton recalled, “There was a sense that we couldn’t get anywhere as long as poor whites were venting their frustration against blacks. It made sense to organize poor black separately, [to] organize poor whites separately, and then [to] unify them in a common effort, rather than to simply organize poor blacks and leave poor whites out there to be used against the blacks.”²⁴³ Black NSM leaders saw their new orientation as remedying the divisive nature of race to prevent blacks and whites from sharing similar agendas.

Unfortunately, some NSM members interpreted the new agenda differently. The explicit adaptation of the NSM’s program to black power caused a rift between blacks and whites in the organization. The rift, though not consistent along race lines, became detectable. Andrea Cousins, former Harlem Education Project director, returned from her travels abroad in 1964. Arriving to a changed political scene, black power had “arisen” within the NSM, “Blacks and whites were getting to be [at] odds with each other. So the black and white organization we had put together came apart.” Admitting that she “missed out on a lot,” she was saddened to see a

²⁴² William Strickland, “America and Civil Rights,” *Freedom North*, vol. 1, no. 6, NSM Papers, Box 3, Folder 4.

²⁴³ Quoted in *Up South*, 368.

growing division between black and white NSM members. For her, interracial organizing was at the very core of grassroots democracy. Black power at the time, in her perspective, seemed like an ideological conception but not a practical one. “I didn’t understand it because I didn’t know how it operated locally.”²⁴⁴

Hesitancy towards the black power concept continued to stem from its overwhelming overrepresentation as black separatism in the national media.²⁴⁵ Cousins resented black power in the organization because she perceived it to be exclusionary to whites. Her prior involvement with the National Students Association motivated her to join the NSM and HEP. “It was a huge gathering of white and black people,” she remembered. She recalled the nostalgic feeling of “standing in this huge circle and singing together” at an annual conference. “I remember standing in this huge circle and singing together and just feeling...we were doing something so important and so great.” Now, in 1965, Cousins felt as she was outside the beloved community of the NSM. “Black power wasn’t for me and mine.” Although the media failed to offer more thoughtful criticisms of black power and American liberalism, Cousins believed it was “ignorance on [her] part” that she failed to support the NSM’s shift to black power. “I probably knew black power was a positive and necessary development but the fact that we could no longer work together was a sad moment to me.” Combined with her political view and new graduate studies, Cousins did not seek to return to the NSM. “It was just a parting of the ways,” Cousins recalled.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁴ Andrea Cousins, interview with author, January 31, 2014.

²⁴⁵ Peniel Joseph, e.d. *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era* (New York: Taylor and Francis Group, 2006), 2.

²⁴⁶ Cousins, interview with author, January 31, 2014.

The call for racial separatism did not go without being contested by some. Class, for example, presented an issue. This was a point of content for NSM and SDS. Prior to the NSM's call for black power in 1965, there was often "rivalry and competition" between the two New Left groups on ideology and organizing practices.²⁴⁷ Similar to the NSM, the SDS's Economic Research Action Program, or ERAP, found itself stymied by the academic rigor of its analyses and then later committed itself to an "interracial movement of the poor."²⁴⁸ Strickland believed the NSM espoused a more radical program in comparison to SDS. Unlike the NSM, Strickland assessed, the SDS had not accepted a black alliance to address the black freedom struggle. "They...deny the racist nature of the country...They define the entire struggle not in terms of lynching and niggers but in terms for pursuit of goodies. But America only gives lip service to distinction between rich and poor niggers," Strickland wrote.²⁴⁹ For the black NSM, the movement needed black solidarity across class lines. Don Jackson, a black ERAP staff member and a regular writer to *Freedom North* expressed his frustration with ERAP and his position as the only member on its 1964 summer project to protect whites from a critique of their leadership structure. He criticized the "bad strategy of deploying white kids into the black ghetto."²⁵⁰ He challenged their commitment to coalition building, writing, "In spite of Baldwin, of Malcolm, of LeRoi, or even that schmuck Moynihan-ERAP does not admit to this TRUTH re racism." What is the answer for the white ERAPers in the ghetto?"²⁵¹ Jackson proposed the answer: "Pack the

²⁴⁷ Paul Lyons, "The People of This Generation: The Rise and Fall of the New Left in Philadelphia," (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 43.

²⁴⁸ Letter from Strickland to Staff, n.d., NSM Papers, Box 1, Folder 3.

²⁴⁹ Quoted in Lyons, 49.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Baldwin refers to James Baldwin and LeRoi to LeRoi Jones who became Amiri Baraka, African-American writer and Moynihan refers to Daniel Moynihan, U.S. Senator and sociologist.

hell up. Get out. Go to work in your own communities and come back when and if that ghetto gets itself together and invites you (or more likely, your money back).”²⁵²

Strickland feared that the move away from the interracial organizing tradition and the “old” civil rights movement could lead to a black freedom struggle without a concrete platform to generate black political consciousness. Blacks in the NSM were still under the influence of white liberal thinking, Strickland asserted, and as such, could potentially create an “irrelevant program of black militancy.” “The point is there are fragments of white analysis in our thinking [that] must be purged.” Moreover, Strickland desired to create a new program in the NSM that could awaken a political consciousness that did not attack whites but instead showed why black political organization was necessary. “We must be objective and not emotional. We will scare some of our own....We cannot do that by calling [whites] all Toms...The truth will line everybody up--who can be lined up. We do not have to yell and scream—the truth will show the way.”²⁵³

Funding became the NSM’s biggest challenge, after its transition to becoming an independent political organization. Until the summer of 1964, the NSM had strong financial support from foundations, college groups, churches and individual donors.²⁵⁴ In January 1965, however, Frank Joyce wrote to supporters explaining the dire need for financial support. The Detroit Project now “[stood] at the brink of extinction” with staff salaries at less than \$25 and a telephone and supply tab that was “extended beyond the normal limit.”²⁵⁵ Churchville

²⁵² Quoted in Lyons, 49.

²⁵³ Letter from Strickland to Staff, n.d., NSM Papers, Box 1, Folder 3.

²⁵⁴ “The Northern Student Movement, 1961-1964,” NSM Papers, Box 10, Folder 8.

²⁵⁵ Letter from Frank Joyce to supporters, January 1965, NSM Papers, Box 6, Folder 3. One of NSM’s Detroit Supporters was listed as Mrs. Rosa Parks. Rosa Parks, the Montgomery bus boycott pioneer and activist lived in Detroit until her death in 2005.

experienced similar funding issues. The Freedom Library only received an initial grant from the Dolfinger-McMahon Fund for \$1200.²⁵⁶ Strickland proposed that the decrease in funding could have been directly linked to the exchange in leadership between him and Countryman---an exchange from white leadership to black leadership.²⁵⁷ Foundations' lack of contributions and support of the black freedom struggle was a direct response of elite white liberal leaders. Karen Ferguson, in her study of the Ford Foundation and its racial liberalism during the black power era, shows how the power relationship between the Foundation and grantees often meant that the Foundation's social vision prevailed. In the NSM's case, the decrease in foundation funds modeled a "top down and conservative strategy of leadership development to manage the black community."²⁵⁸

The new national black movement the NSM sought to build did not continue in its local city projects. By the spring of 1966, many of the local projects either closed their doors or became independent entities with the exception of New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Detroit. The NSM turned its attention to organizing college students. In May 1966, the NSM sponsored an Afro-American Student Conference in North Philadelphia at Reverend Paul M. Washington's Church of the Advocate. Black college students attended various workshops and discussions to understand the avenues to get involved in the movement. The students brought great interests and energies while gaining lessons about racial consciousness and the community organizing tradition. They equipped themselves to intensify the black freedom struggles on their college

²⁵⁶ Churchville, interview with author, January 27, 2014.

²⁵⁷ Strickland, e-mail correspondence with author, March 19, 2014.

²⁵⁸ Karen Ferguson, *Top Down: The Ford Foundation, Black Power, and the Reinvention of Racial Liberalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2013), 11.

campus, whether at historically black universities or white institutions. The Afro-American Student Conference became the fuel for the “black campus revolution.”²⁵⁹

The NSM remained steadfast in its approach to the grassroots black political tradition. Nowhere was this more evident than in the Black People’s Unity Movement (BPUM). Beginning in the fall of 1965, Churchville and the Freedom Library’s participants had utilized the Freedom Library as a training ground for the first black power movement in Philadelphia. The BPUM, like the Freedom Library, became an all-black organization to bring black Philadelphians across class and ideological lines in another escape of the liberal alliance. “With teas, socials, garden parties and other sordid activities,” the BPUM, could attract the “Black bourgeoisie” to make up for the loss of white funding.²⁶⁰ It did. Churchville recalled, that “teachers, doctors, at least one lawyer...and people on welfare” attended meetings.²⁶¹ Rather than trying to build a movement on ideological unity, it fostered “operational unity,” as one Freedom Library participant described it. By having different class sectors of the black community represented, the BPUM’s membership had the potential to take control of the black freedom library in every realm of society. BPUM’s goal centered on uplifting the community to engage in political protest while simultaneously creating black power.

BPUM activists planned the city’s first Black Unity Rally in early 1966. Strickland, although stationed in NSM’s New York headquarters, travelled often to Philadelphia to work with Churchville and other Freedom Library activists to publicize and galvanize participation for the rally. Churchville also invited Reverend Washington, the black Episcopal priest and well-known community leader. Reverend Washington became involved in the Freedom Library after

²⁵⁹ Martha Biondi, *The Black Revolution On Campus* (Berkeley, University of California, 2012).

²⁶⁰ Letter from Hilton Clarke to Churchville, July 11, 1966, NSM Papers, Box 14, Folder 1.

²⁶¹ Quoted in *Up South*, 204.

recognizing that the church did not engage with social issues. On one of the city's black radio talk shows, Churchville, Strickland, and Reverend Washington marketed the Black Unity Rally as an important one for black Philadelphians. Unknown to the guests, the Federal Bureau of Investigation had begun to monitor black radio talk shows throughout the country because Hoover believed it was a way to disseminate the supposedly threatening black power agenda. Churchville encouraged the black middle class to support the rally while Strickland argued that whites dominated the movement up until then and the mainstream black leadership proved ineffective. "The question of black liberation, the freedom of black people if not finding the proper leader, Strickland commented. Therefore, the rally would be a "movement of all the people that tells the leaders what to do."²⁶²

The first Black Unity Rally, held on February 5, 1966, introduced first black power organization to Philadelphia. Symbolic of the beloved community's social activism, Reverend Washington gave Churchville permission to use the church. Churchville and Strickland invited Julian Bond, the "boyish-looking 26-year old SNCC veteran, to give the rally's keynote address. Bond had recently removed his legislative seat in the Georgia Legislature after he refused to disown his views on the Vietnam War.²⁶³ Bond played a critical role in the southern grassroots movement and as a SNCC cohort member on SNCC's Africa tour in September 1964.²⁶⁴ In 1966, Bond communicated to the rally's attendees the interconnected nature of the black freedom struggle at home and abroad. A stirring sermon-like speech, Bond insisted that the United States engaged in "murder" and "aggression in Vietnam. He shared the attitude of his black constituents

²⁶² Quoted in *Up South*, 199.

²⁶³ Ted Pickett, "Anti-White Bias Irritates Cleric: Black Militants At Church Rally," *Philadelphia Tribune*, February 8, 1966, pg. 1.

²⁶⁴ Carson, 134-135.



Black Unity Rally at the Church of the Advocate hosted by SNCC and CORE but sponsored by the Black People's Unity Movement, *Philadelphia Tribune*, July 19, 1966.

who were also against the war. "The people said," he reported "why should any black man fight for this country because this country has never fought for him."²⁶⁵

The BPUM arguably provided the NSM's strongest rejection to date of white liberal alliances. The *Tribune* reported that "over three hundred people, white and Negro, had gathered in the small church."²⁶⁶ At the Black Unity Rally, white supporters of the BPUM, gathered in the front pews in eager anticipation of the day's gathering. The church quickly filled up and black attendees remained standing in the aisle. For Churchville, this symbolized the imposed racial hierarchy within and outside the movement. Churchville quickly took to the altar and asked the white attendees to give up their seats for those standing in the aisle. Reverend Washington knew it was against church policy to ask them to leave but Churchville believed the white attendees

²⁶⁵ Ted Pickett, "Anti-White Bias Irritates Cleric: Black Militants At Church Rally," *Philadelphia Tribune*, February 8, 1966, pg. 1.

²⁶⁶ Ted Pickett, "Anti-White Bias Irritates Cleric: Black Militants At Church Rally," *Philadelphia Tribune*, February 8, 1966, pg. 1.

ignored the rally's advertisement: "For of and by BLACK youth."²⁶⁷ In the days following the rally, Churchville and the BPUM organizers received harsh criticism from the city's newspapers and moderate black leadership. A fellow Episcopal priest of Reverend Washington published a letter condemning Churchville's request to the white rally attendees. He was in "shock and horror [at] segregation and hatred in the House of the Lord."²⁶⁸

The events at the Black Unity Rally and the newly formed BPUM disturbed the city's black conservative leadership at its very core. Reverend Jesse Anderson wrote to Reverend Dewitt, the Bishop of the Diocese of Philadelphia, "It is unfortunate that these people (the Northern Student Movement leaders) do not realize that those of us who have been working for Negro freedom are actually fighting for the freedom, equality, and dignity of all men regardless of color." Immediately, he promised Reverend Dewitt, he would write to newspapers and to the white attendees to express his "apology and heartfelt chagrin to attempt to vilify a set of people because of the color of their skin."²⁶⁹ Anderson kept his promise and a month later he reported that the unseating of whites had occurred once again. A fellow white pastor and friend of his, he claimed, relayed to him that Churchville quietly asked him to leave. Despite Churchville's promise that the BPUM organizers were going to be "polite and courteous", they continued "bias, bigotry, and racism no less comprehensible than that practiced by Bull Connor. Anderson reprimanded the group for their "immature" actions.²⁷⁰ "There was nothing said that any white

²⁶⁷ Quoted in *Up South*, 202.

²⁶⁸ Ted Pickett, "Anti-White Bias Irritates Cleric: Black Militants At Church Rally," *Philadelphia Tribune*, February 8, 1966, pg. 1.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Jesse Anderson, "Bias, Bigotry, and Racism of Northern Student Movement's as Bad as Bull Connor's," *Philadelphia Tribune*, pg. 6. "Bull Connor" was the Commissioner of Public Safety in Alabama during the 1963 Birmingham campaign. Connor became an international symbol of racism and white repression when he ordered the use of fire hoses and police dogs towards peaceful protestors, especially children, in the Birmingham March.

man could not hear and some things were said that they might have profited from by hearing.”

The movement the BPUM was stirring, in Anderson’s perspective, was “an unrealistic soporific which affords appeal to a people who are frustrated and gullible.”²⁷¹

BPUM organizers believed the criticism and repudiation of Churchville’s actions were evidence that the black power issue officially presented a threat to the moderate and conservative leadership in the city and even the national movement. At the same time, the “conservative” NAACP and SCLC conflicted with the “militant” SNCC and CORE over nonviolent tactics, the NSM, via the BPUM, confronted the city’s established black leadership. A member of the NSM asked, “Why is white unity all right and black unity racial discrimination in the reverse?”²⁷² For Churchville, their “real movement”, based on black collective action and organization, found itself blocked by those who favored the liberal civil rights alliance.

Matthew Countryman has correctly noted that the BPUM did not gain national standing as a mass black nationalist organization but rather influenced “issues of racial consciousness and community control [as] the focus of black activism in the city.”²⁷³ The BPUM continued to host rallies at Reverend Washington’s church. The organization’s emphasis remained on the connection between the black freedom movements in the United States and Africa’s colonial struggles. The NSM sponsored the visit of E.P. Mwaluko of Tanzania, a United Nations ambassador, to speak at a rally held on March 19, 1966. Mwaluko drew parallels between the independent political organizations in Tanzania and the United States.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Quoted in *Up South*, 203.

²⁷³ Ibid., 204.



Stokely Carmichael at Black Unity Rally in Philadelphia. On the right is James Forman, SNCC activist. *Philadelphia Tribune*, December 3, 1966. pg. 2.



MUTUAL ADMIRATION is exhibited by Stokely Carmichael and Miss Nina Simone as they exchange remarks at the "Black Power" Rally held at the Church of the Advocate, 18th and Diamond Sts., Sunday. The affair was sponsored by the local chapters of CORE and SNCC.

Nina Simone and Stokely Carmichael at Black Unity Rally. *Philadelphia Tribune*, July 19, 1966. pg. 2.

"Black Unity Day will have made its modest contribution if it hastens the day when Americans and Africa will become united in their common struggle."²⁷⁴ In September 1966, the BPUM held a weekend of cultural events that drew over 300 people and featured John Coltrane, the jazz saxophonist. Churchville's own Freedom Jazz Trio performed. The next year, the storeowner of the "Uhuru Hut", a local retailer of African attire and paintings, reported that her businesses had experienced a "boom" because of the Black People's Unity Movement.²⁷⁵

The BPUM became influential in connecting the city's residents with a network of civil rights organizations and black power activists. Most notable, was the rally that featured Stokely Carmichael as the keynote speaker. Carmichael, a couple months before, echoed the words

²⁷⁴ E.P. Mwaluko, "The Establishment of a Black Government Out of a Colonial Past," *Freedom North*, vol. 2 no.2, June 1966, NSM Papers, Box 3, Folder 6.

²⁷⁵ Ted Pickett, "Storefront Shop Mecca for African Attire and Paintings, Scriptures," *Philadelphia Tribune*, January 14, 1967, pg.2.

“Black Power!” during the 1966 Meredith “March Against Fear” in response to the killing of James Meredith, the University of Mississippi students who enrolled after much protest. In his speech, he critiqued the Vietnam War and the civil rights movement. He presented practical ways that the black community could apply a “positive use of black power.” He added, “Black power is black unity and unity is democracy not hypocrisy.” In simple terms, Carmichael and other speakers sought to cultivate a movement ranging from the working class community to the upper class community. Nina Simone, the jazz singer and civil rights activist, remarked, “I have been thinking of some of the things I’ve heard since I was three years old.”²⁷⁶

The BPUM facilitated the black power activism network in Philadelphia. In 1966, SNCC opened its Philadelphia office to carry the movement up North. The BPUM, however, had already established a movement to continue the local grassroots tradition.

In its final two years of existence, the NSM became the target of police repression activity. The Detroit NSM, in 1965, began investigating cases of police brutality, and one year later, 19 staff members reported incidences.²⁷⁷ In Hartford, members of NECAP presented a “19-point program for improving Negro life in Hartford’s North End ghetto.”²⁷⁸ Instead of receiving a response from the city, members were charged with “inciting to harm persons or property” and “breach of the peace.” In Philadelphia, police raided the Freedom Library upon accusations that it was a “storehouse of arms and ammunition.” An NSM reporter, wrote, “The vanguard of the

²⁷⁶ Chet Coleman, “PO to Remain CORE Head Tells Black Power Rally,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, July 19, 1966.

²⁷⁷ NECAP Police Brutality, NSM Papers, Box 6, Folder 5.

²⁷⁸ Detroit Police Attack NSM in Detroit, NSM Papers, Box 6, Folder 5.

raid was 20 machine gun welding, bulletproof wearing policemen, backed up by 1,000 police stationed outside.” Aside from the extra force, Churchville was “pushed in the chest in an attempt to provoke a reaction.” The police, despite their comprehensive search, found no signs of what an “unidentified informant” told them. The NSM, as a black power organization, now faced harassment, arrests, and threats. The turn to black power was an inevitable turn to state repression. Thus, in the final years, the NSM leaders, after deciding to launch a “movement of the ghetto” faced the same issues as the communities they worked with.

Epilogue: “Where Do We Go From Here?”

“In the area of ideology, despite the impact of the works of a few Negro writers on a limited number of white intellectuals, all too few Negro thinkers have exerted an influence on the main currents of American thought.”

-Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

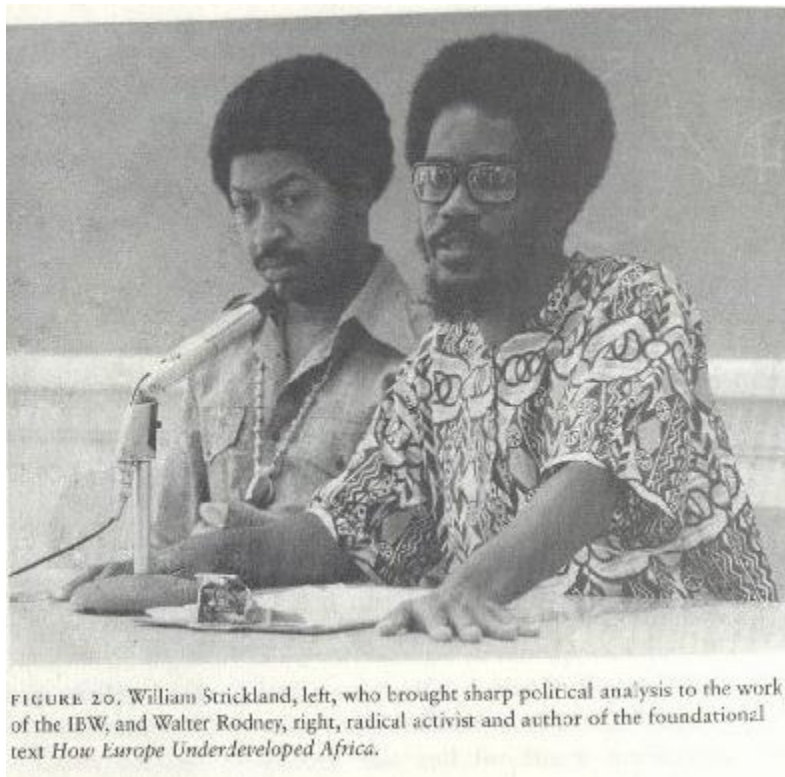


FIGURE 20. William Strickland, left, who brought sharp political analysis to the work of the IBW, and Walter Rodney, right, radical activist and author of the foundational text *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*.

Before his untimely death in April 1968, Dr. King wrote his last book, *Where Do We Go From Here? Chaos or Community?* Dr. King responded to the calls of many movement leaders, black and white, integrationist, nationalist or black power oriented, on the growing recognition that the movement had only filled part of its purpose. The movement's purpose was captured but forgotten in the actual name of the March on Washington: “March on Washington for Jobs and

Economic Freedom.” Dr. King came to the growing realization that only an economic restructuring of society could bring radical democratic change to America’s black citizens. The NSM, however, grasped this notion from the beginning of its days in New Haven, Connecticut.

The NSM’s transition from a fundraising organization for SNCC to a northern student activist organization signaled NSM leaders growing conviction that race and class issues were urgent issues across urban communities that needed to be addressed. With remarkable, conscious idealism, students in their 20s left their college education to engage in a political struggle beyond picket lines. SNCC served as inspiration and soon the NSM began to pioneer their own community organizing tradition in the North. Tutorial projects were designed to correspond to the failures of the education system. Soon, the NSM began community action programs to address not only education, but rather the failing of American democracy as it related to acquiring equal, black citizenship. There, they reformed the American democratic tradition and they worked with community leaders and activists to grow a movement. The NSM’s involvement in New York’s rent strikes and the Black People’s Unity Movement showed that black autonomy and black political power could bring such radical democratic change that the movement as a whole failed to accomplish.

The movement never ended for the NSM. Black NSM leaders heeded the call of Dr. King and Malcolm X that black intellectuals needed to influence the academic sphere. Today, William Strickland is a retired professor at the University of Massachusetts. Before his retirement, Strickland was the director of the Dubois Papers Collection, named after W.E.B. Dubois, the 20th century’s most prominent African-American intellectual. With Vincent Harding, he launched the nation’s first black political think tank, the Institute of the Black World, in 1970. John Churchville is a local community activist in Philadelphia. The Freedom Library lasted

beyond the NSM's days. In 1966, the Freedom Library became the Freedom Library Day School, which saw the entrance of young, black students for 14 years. Churchville was an influential leader in the independent black schools movement. Joan Countryman served as Co-Director of Oprah's Leadership Academy in South Africa from 2006 to 2007. Before then, she was the head of the Lincoln School in Providence, Rhode Island. Other NSM leaders also took the lessons they learned to their careers. Andrea Cousins is a psychiatrist. Dr. Chafe is a prominent American historian and my thesis adviser! What a remarkable story and a remarkable group of people.

Today, the nation's first black president, President Barack Obama, has on his resume "community organizer." Before he attended Harvard Law School, President Obama worked with residents of Chicago's South Side to launch a tutoring program, a job training program and a tenants' rights organization. The NSM's work certainly became influential in championing the role of the community organizing tradition in achieving participatory democracy. What a remarkable story and remarkable journey.

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